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The Massarenes

By

Ouida

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THE MASSARENES

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THE MASSARENES

BY

OUIDA

AUTHOR OF "UNDER TWO FLAGS," "SYRLIN"

NEW YORK

R. F. FENNO & COMPANY

112 FIFTH AVENUE

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The Massarenes

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TO

A BELOVED FRIEND,

THE LADY HOWARD OF GLOSSOP.
(WINIFRED MARY DE LISLE.)

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NOTICE.

In case it may be supposed that the African episode in this book was suggested by recent events in the Transvaal, I desire to state that it was written four years before the Jameson raid occurred.

OUIDA.

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THE MASSARENES.

CHAPTER I.

"MOUSE," said her husband to Lady Kenilworth, one morning at Homburg, "do you see that large pale woman over there, with a face like a crumpled whitey-brown paper bag?"

Lady Kenilworth looked.

"Yes," she said, impatiently. "Yes. Well?—what?—why?"

"Well, she rolls—she absolutely rolls—wallows—biggest pile ever made out West."

His wife looked again with a little more attention at the large figure of a lady, superbly clothed, who sat alone under a tree, and had that desolate air of "not being in it" which betrays the unelect.

"Nobody discovered her? Nobody taken her up?" she asked, still looking through her eye-glass.

"Well, old Khris a little; but Khris can't get anybody on now. He does 'em more harm than good. He's dead broke."

His wife smiled.

"They must be new, indeed, if they don't know that. Would they be rich enough to buy Vale Royal of Gerald?"

"Lord, yes; rich enough to buy a hundred Gerrys and Vales Royal. I know it for a fact from men in the City: they are astonishing—biggest income in the United States, after Vanderbilt and Pullman."

"American, then?"

"No; made their 'stiff' there, and come home to spend it."

"Name?"

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"Massarene. Cotton to her if you can. There's money to be made."

"Hush! somebody will hear."

Her lord chuckled.

"Does anybody know these dear souls and their kind for any other reason than the flimsy? She's looking your way. You'll have to introduce yourself, for she don't know anybody here. Make Boo fall down and break her nose in front of her."

Boo was a four-year-old angel with lovely black eyes and bright yellow hair, the second child of the Kenilworth family. Accompanied by one of her nurses, she was playing near them, with a big rosy bladder tied to a string.

"I don't think the matter so difficult that Boo's nose need be sacrificed. At what hotel is this person staying?"

"At ours."

"Oh! Then the thing's very easy."

She nodded and dismissed him. She was on fairly good terms with her husband, and would make common cause with him when it suited her; but she could not stand much of his society. She took another prolonged stare through her eye-glass at the large pale woman, so splendidly attired, sitting in solitude under the tree, then rose and walked away in her graceful and nonchalant fashion, with her knot of young men around her. She was followed by the dreary envious gaze of the lonely lady whose countenance had been likened to a large whitey-brown paper bag.

"If one could but get to know *her* all the rest would come easy," thought that solitary and unhappy outsider, looking longingly after that pliant and perfect figure with its incomparable air of youth, of sovereignty, and of indifference. What was the use of having an income second only to Vanderbilt's and Pullman's?

There are things which cannot be purchased. Manner is chief amongst them.

Margaret Massarene was very lonely indeed, as she sat under the big tree watching the gay, many-colored, animated crowd amongst which there was not a creature with

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whom she had even a bowing acquaintance. Her lord and master, of whom she stood in much awe, was away on business in Frankfort; her daughter, her only living child, was in India; she was here because it was the proper place for an aspirant to society to be in at that season; but of all this multitude of royal people, titled people, pretty people, idle people, who thronged the alleys and crowded the hotels, she did not know a single creature. She envied her own maid who had many acquaintances with other maids and couriers and smart German sergeants and corporals of cavalry.

On the previous day she had made also a fatal mistake. As she had crossed the hall of her own hotel, she had seen a fair small woman, insignificantly dressed, in a deer-stalker's hat and a gray ulster, who was arguing with the cashier about an item in her bill which she refused to pay: so many kreutzer for ice; ice was always given gratis, she averred; and she occupied the whole window of the cashier's bureau as she spoke, having laid down an umbrella, a packet of newspapers, and a mackintosh on the shelf. Indignant at being made to wait by such a shabby little person, Mrs. Massarene pushed her aside. "Folks as has to count pence shouldn't come to grand hotels," she muttered, with more reason than politeness, elbowing away the shabby fair woman.

The shabby fair woman turned round and stared, then laughed: the cashier and the clerk were confounded, and lost their presence of mind. To the shabby fair woman a man in plain clothes, obviously her servant, approached, and bowing low said, "If you please, madam, his Imperial Majesty is at the door." And the lady who quarreled with a clerk for half a kreutzer went out of the hall, and mounted besides a gentleman who was driving himself; one of those gentlemen to whom all the world doff their hats, yet who, by a singular contradiction, are always guarded by policemen.

The Massarene courier, who was always hovering near his mistress in the vain effort to preserve her from wrong-doing, took her aside.

"It's Mrs. Cecil Courcy, madam," he murmured. "There's nobody so chic as Mrs. Cecil Courcy. She's

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hand and glove with all them royalties. Pinching and screwing—oh yes, that she *do*—but then you see, madam, she *can* do it."

"You won't tell your master, Gregson?" said Mrs. Massarene in an agony of penitence.

Gregson winced at the word "master," but he answered sincerely, "No, madam; I won't tell Mr. Massarene. But if you think that because they're high they're large, you're very much mistaken. Lord, ma'am, they'll pocket the *marrons glacés* at the *table d'hôte* and take the matches away from their bedrooms, but then, you see, ma'am, them as are swagger can do them things. Mrs. Cecil Courcy might steal the spoons if she'd a mind to do it!"

Mrs. Massarene gasped. A great name covering a multitude of small thefts appalled her simple mind.

"You can't mean it, Gregson?" she said with breathless amaze.

"Indeed, madam, I do," said the courier, "and that's why, madam, I won't ever go into service with gentlefolks. They've got such a lot to keep up, and so precious little to do it with, that they're obliged to pinch and to screw and get three sixpences out of a shilling, as I tell you, madam."

Mrs. Massarene was sad and silent. It was painful to hear one's own courier say that he would never take service with "gentlefolk." One never likes to see oneself as others see us.

The poignant horror of that moment as she had seen the imperial wheels flash and rotate through the flying dust was still fresh in her mind, and should have prevented her from ever trusting to her own judgment or forming that judgment from mere appearances. She could still hear the echo of the mocking voice of that prince whom Kenilworth had described as "dead broke" saying to her, as he had said more than once in England: "Not often do you make a mistake; ah no, not often, my very dear madam, not often; but when you do make one—*eh bien, vous la faites belle!*"

Mrs. Massarene sighed heavily as she sat alone under her tree, her large hands folded on her lap; the lessons of society seemed to her of an overwhelming difficulty and

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intricacy. How could she possibly have guessed that the great Mrs. Cecil Courcy, who gave tea and bread-and-butter to kings and sang duets with their consorts, was a little shabby, pale-faced being in a deerstalker's hat and a worn gray ulster who had disputed *in propriâ personâ* at the cashier's office the change of half a kreutzer on her bill for some iced water?

As she was thinking these melancholy thoughts and meditating on the isolation of her greatness, a big rose-colored bladder struck her a sharp blow on the cheek; and at her involuntary cry of pain and surprise a little child's voice said pleadingly, "Oh! begs 'oo pardon—vewy muss!"

The rosebud face of Lady Kenilworth's little daughter was at her knee, and its prettiness and penitence touched to the quick her warm maternal heart.

"My little dear, 'tis nothing at all," she said, stooping to kiss the child under its white lace coalscuttle bonnet. Boo submitted to the caress, though she longed to rub the place kissed by the stranger.

"It didn't hurt 'oo, did it?" she asked solicitously, and then she added in a whisper, "Has 'oo dot any sweeties?"

For she saw that the lady was kind, and thought her pretty, and in her four-year-old mind decided to utilize the situation. As it chanced, Mrs. Massarene, being fond of "sweeties" herself, had some caramels in a gold bon-bon-box, and she pressed them, box and all, into the little hands in their tiny tan gloves.

Boo's beautiful sleepy black eyes grew wide-awake with pleasure.

"Dat's a real dold box," she said, with the fine instincts proper to one who will have her womanhood in the twentieth century. And slipping it in her little bosom she ran off with it to regain her nurse.

Her mother was walking past at the moment with the King of Greece on one side of her, and the Duc d'Orléans on the other; wise little Boo kept aloof with her prize. But she knew not, or forgot, that her mother's eyes were as the optic organs of the fly which can see all round at once, and possess twelve thousand facets.

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Ten minutes later, when the king had gone to drink his glasses of water and Prince Gamelle had gone to breakfast, Lady Kenilworth, leading her sulky and unwilling Boo by the hand, approached the tree where the lone lady sat. "You have been too kind to my naughty little girl," she said with her sweetest smile. "She must not keep this *bonbonnière*; the contents are more than enough for a careless little trot who knocks people about with her balloon."

Mrs. Massarene, agitated almost out of speech and sense at the sight of this radiant apparition which spoke with such condescension to her, stammered thanks, excuses, protestations in an unintelligible hotchpot of confused phrases; and let the gold box fall neglected to the ground.

"The dear pretty baby," she said entreatingly. "Oh, pray, ma'am, oh, pray, my lady, do let her have it, such a trifle as it is!"

"No, indeed I cannot," said Lady Kenilworth firmly, but still with her most winning smile, and she added with that graceful abruptness natural to her, "Do tell me, I am not quite sure, but wasn't it you who snubbed Phyllis Courcy so delightfully at the hotel bureau yesterday morning?"

Mrs. Massarene's pallid face became purple.

"Oh, my lady," she said faintly, "I shall never get over it, such a mistake as I made! When Mr. Massarene comes to hear of it he'll be ready to kill me——"

"It was quite delightful," said Lady Kenilworth with decision. "Nobody ever dares pull her up for her cheeseparing ways. We were all enchanted. She is a detestable cat, and if she hadn't that mezzo-soprano voice she wouldn't be petted and cossetted at Balmoral and Berlin and Bernsdorff as she is. She is my aunt by marriage, but I hate her."

"Dear me, my lady," murmured Mrs. Massarene, doubtful if her ears could hear aright. "I was ready to sink into my shoes," she added, "when I saw her drive away with the Emperor."

Lady Kenilworth laughed, a genuine laugh which meant a great number of things, unexplained to her auditor. Then she nodded; a little pleasant familiar nod of farewell.

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"We shall meet again. We are at the same hotel. Thanks so much for your kindness to my naughty pet."

And with the enchanting smile she used when she wanted to turn people's heads she nodded again, and went on her way, dragging the reluctant Boo away from the tree and the golden box.

When she consigned her little daughter to the nurse, Boo's big black eyes looked up at her in eloquent reproach. The big black eyes said what the baby lips did not dare to say: "I did what you told me; I hit the lady very cleverly as if it was accident, and then you wouldn't let me have the pretty box, and you called me naughty!"

Later, in the nursery, Boo poured out her sorrows to her brother Jack, who exactly resembled herself with his yellow hair, his big dark eyes, and his rosebud of a mouth.

"She telled me to hit the old 'ooman, and then she said I was naughty 'cos I did it, and she tooked away my dold box!"

"Never mind, Boo. Mammy always lets one in for it. What'd you tell her of the box for? Don't never tell mammy nothin'," said Jack in the superior wisdom of the masculine sex and ten months greater age.

Boo sobbed afresh.

"I didn't tell her. She seed it through my frock."

Jack kissed her.

"Let's find old woman, Boo, if we can get out all by 'selves, and we'll ask her for the box."

Boo's face cleared.

"And we'll tell her mammy telled me to hit her!"

Jack's cherub face grew grave.

"N-n-no. We won't do that, Boo. Mammy's a bad un to split on."

Jack had once overheard this said on the staircase by Lord Kenilworth, and his own experiences had convinced him of the truth of it. "Mammy can be cruel nasty," he added, with great solemnity of aspect and many painful personal recollections.

Mrs. Massarene had remained under the tree digesting the water she had drunk, and the memory of the blunder she had made with regard to Mrs. Courcy. She ought to

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have known that there is nothing more perilous than to judge by appearances, for this is a fact to be learned in kitchens as well as palaces. But she had not known it, and by not knowing it had offended a person who went *en intime* to Balmoral, and Berlin, and Bernsdorff!

Half an hour later, when she slowly and sorrowfully walked back through the gardens of her hotel, to go in to luncheon, two bright cherubic apparitions came toward her over the grass.

Walking demurely hand-in-hand, looking the pictures of innocent infancy, Jack and Boo, having had their twelve o'clock dinner, dedicated their united genius to the finding and besieging of the old fat woman.

"How's 'oo do?" said Boo very affably, whilst her brother, leaving her the initiative, pulled his sky-blue Tam o' Shanter cap off his golden curls with his best possible manner.

Their victim was enchanted by their overtures, and forgot that she was hungry, as these radiant little Gainsborough figures blocked her path. They were welcome to her as children, but as living portions of the peerage they were divinities.

"What's your name, my pretty dears?" she said, much flattered and embarrassed. "You're Lord Kersterholme, aren't you, sir?"

"I'm Kers'ham, 'ess. But I'm Jack," said the boy with the big black eyes and the yellow locks, cut short over his forehead and falling long on his shoulders.

"And your dear little sister, she's Lady Beatrix Orme?" said Mrs. Massarene, who had read their names and dates of birth a score of times in her 'Burke.'

"She's Boo," said Jack.

Boo herself stood with her little nose and chin in the air, and her mouth pursed contemptuously. She was ready to discharge herself of scathing ironies on the personal appearance of the questioner, but she resisted the impulse because to indulge it might endanger the restoration of the gold box.

"I am sure you are very fond of your pretty mamma, my dears?" said Mrs. Massarene, wondering why they thus honored her by standing in her path.

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Boo shut up her rosy mouth and her big eyes till they were three straight lines of cruel scorn, and was silent.

Jack hesitated.

"We're very fond of Harry," he said, by way of compromise, and as in allusion to a substitute.

"Who is Harry?" asked Mr. Massarene, surprised.

The children were puzzled. Who was Harry?

They were used to seeing him perpetually, to playing with him, to teasing him, to getting everything they wanted out of him; but, as to who he was, of that they had never thought.

"He's in the Guards," said Jack at last. "The Guards that have the white tails on their heads, you know, and ride down Portland Place of a morning."

"He belongs to mammy," said Boo, by way of additional identification; she was a lovely little fresh dewdrop of childhood only just four years old, but she had a sparkle of malice and meaning in her tone and her eyes, of which her brother was innocent.

"Oh, indeed," murmured Mrs. Massarene, more and more embarrassed; for ought she knew, it might be the habit for ladies in the great world to have an officer of the Guards attached to their service.

Jack looked critically at the strange lady. "Don't 'oo know people?" he asked; this poor old fat woman seemed to him very forlorn and friendless.

"I don't know many people as yet, my lord," murmured their victim humbly.

"Is 'oo a cook or a nurse?" said Jack, with his head on one side, surveying her with puzzled compassion.

"My dear little sir!" cried Mrs. Massarene, horrified. "Why, gracious me! I'm a lady."

Jack burst out laughing. "Oh, no, 'oo isn't," he said decidedly. "Ladies don't say they's ladies."

Boo twitched his hand to remind him of the ultimate object of their mission.

Mrs. Massarene had never more cruelly felt how utterly she was "nobody" at her first Drawing-room, than she felt it now under the merciless eyes of these chicks.

Boo pulled Jack's sleeve. "She won't give us nothin' else if 'oo tease her," she whispered in his rosy ear.

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Jack shook her off. "P'r'aps we're rude," he said remorsefully to his victim. "We's sorry if we've vexed 'oo."

"And does 'oo want the little box mammy gived back to 'oo?" said Boo desperately, perceiving that her brother would never attack this main question.

Over the plain broad flat face of the poor plebian there passed a gleam of intelligence, and a shadow of disappointment. It was only for sake of the golden box that these little angels had smilingly blocked her road!

She brought out the *bonbonnière* at once from her pocket. "Pray take it and keep it, my little lady," she said to Boo, who required no second bidding; and after a moment's hesitation Mrs. Massarene took out of her purse a new Napoleon. "Would you please, my lord," she murmured, pushing the bright coin into Jack's fingers.

Jack colored. He was tempted to take the money; he had spent his last money two days before, and the Napoleon would buy a little cannon for which his heart pined; a real cannon which would load with real little shells. But something indefinite in his mind shrank from taking a stranger's money. He put his hands behind his back. "Thanks, very much," he said resolutely, "but please, no; I'd rather not."

She pressed it on him warmly, but he was obstinate. "No, thanks," he said twice. "'Oo's very kind," he added courteously. "But I don't know 'oo, and I'd rather not." And he adhered to his refusal. He could not have put his sentiment into words, but he had a temper which his sister had not.

"'Oo's very kind," he said again, to soften his refusal.

"'Oo's very kind," repeated Boo sarcastically, with a little grin and a mocking curtsey, "and Jack's a great big goose. Tata!"

She pulled her brother away, being afraid of the arrival of governess, nurse, or somebody who might yet again snatch the gold box away from her.

"Why didn't 'oo take the money, Jack?" she said, as they ran hand-in-hand down the path.

"I don't know," said Jack truthfully. "Somethin' inside me told me not."

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Their forsaken admirer looked after them wistfully. "Fine feathers don't make a fine bird o' me," she thought sorrowfully. "Even those babies see I ain't a lady. I always told William as how it wouldn't be no use. I daresay in time they'll come to us for sake of what they'll get, but they won't never think us aught except the rinsins of the biler."

Lord Kenilworth had been looking idly out of a window of the hotel across the evergreens after his breakfast of brandy and seltzer and had seen the little scene in the garden and chuckled as he saw.

"Shrewd little beggars, gettin' things out of the fat old woman," he thought with approval. "How like they look to their mother; and what a blessing it is there's never any doubts as to the *maternity* of anybody!"

He, although not a student of 'Burke' like Mrs. Massarene, had opened that majestic volume once on a rainy day in the library of a country house, and had looked at his own family record in it, and had seen, underneath his own title and his father's, the names of four little children:—

Sons:
(1) John Cecil Victor, Lord Kersterholme.
(2) Gerald George.
(3) Francis Lionel Desmond Edward.

Daughter:
Beatrix Cicely.

"Dear little duckies!" he had murmured, biting a cigarette. "Sweet little babes! Precious little poppets! Damn 'em the whole blooming lot!"

But he had been quite alone when he had said this: for a man who drank so much as he did he was always remarkably discreet. What he drank did not make him garrulous; it made him suspicious and mute. No one had ever known him allow a word to escape his lips which he would, being sober, have regretted to have said. How many abstemious persons amongst us can boast as much?

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CHAPTER II.

It was four o'clock on a misty and dark afternoon of the month of March in London.

The reception rooms of a fine house facing Grosvenor Gate were all lighted by the last modern perfection of rose-shaded electricity. They were rooms of unusually admirable proportions and size for the city in which they were situated, and were decorated and filled with all that modern resources, both in art and in wealth, can obtain.

Harrenden House, as it was called, had been designed for a rich and eccentric duke of that name, and occupied by him for a few years, at the end of which time he had tired of it, had carried all its treasures elsewhere, and put it up for sale; it had remained unsold and unlet for a very long period, the price asked being too large even for millionaires. At last, in the autumn of the previous year, it had been taken by a person who was much more than a millionaire, though he had been born in a workhouse and had begun life as a cow-boy.

The great mansion had nothing whatever of the *parvènu* about it except its new owner. Its interior had been arranged in perfect taste by an unerring master's hand. The square hall had ancient Italian tapestries, Italian marbles, Italian mosaics, all of genuine age and extreme beauty, whilst from its domed cupola a mellowed light streamed down through painted glass of the fifteenth century, taken from the private chapel of a Flemish castle.

The two-winged staircase, broad and massive, had balustrades of oak which had once been the choir railings of a cathedral in Karinthia, the silver lamps which hung above these stairs had once illumined religious services in the Kremlin, and above the central balustrade leaned, lovely as adolescence, a nude youth with a hawk on his wrist—the work of Clodion.

The rest of the mansion was in the same proportions

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and perfection. No false note jarred on its harmonies, no doubtful thing intruded a coarse or common chord. The household were not pushed away into dark cell-like corners, but had comfortable and airy sleeping-chambers. It was a palace fit for a Queen of Loves; it was a home made for a young Cæsar in the first flush of his dreams of Cleopatra. And it belonged actually to William Massarene, late of Kerosene City, North Dakota, U. S. A., miner, miller, meat salesman, cattle exporter, railway contractor, owner of gambling saloons, and opium dens for the heathen Chinee, and one of the richest and hardiest-headed men in either hemisphere.

Nothing was wanting which money could buy—tapestries, ivories, marbles, bronzes, porcelains, potteries, orchids, palms, roses, silks, satins, and velvets, were all there in profusion. Powdered lackeys lolled in the anteroom, dignified men in black stole noiselessly over carpets soft and elastic as moss; in the tea-room the china was Sèvres of 1770, and the water boiled in what had once been a gold water-vase of Leo X.; in the delicious little oval boudoir the walls were entirely covered with old Saxe plates, and Saxe shepherds and shepherdesses made groups in all the corners, while a Watteau formed the ceiling; and yet, amidst these gay and smiling porcelain people of Meissen, who were a century and a half old, and yet kept the roses on their cheeks and the laugh on their lips, Margaret Massarene, the mistress of it all, sat in solitary state and melancholy meditation; a heavy hopelessness staring in her pale grey eyes, a dreary dejection expressed in the loose clasp of her fat hands folded on her knee, the fingers now and then beating a nervous tattoo. What use was it to have the most beautiful dwelling-house in all London if no one ever beheld its beauties from one week's end to another? What use was it to have a regiment of polished and disdainful servants if there were no visitors of rank for them to receive?

Many things are hard in this world; but nothing is harder than to be ready to prostrate yourself, and be forbidden to do it; to be ready to eat the bitter pastry which is called humble pie, and yet find no table at which so much even as this will be offered you. The great world

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did not affront them; it did worse, it did not seem to know they existed.

"Take a big town house; buy a big country place; ask people; the rest will all follow of itself," had said their counsellor and confidant at the baths of Homburg. They had bought the town house, and the country place, but as yet they had found no people to invite to either of them; and not a soul had as yet called at the magnificent mansion by Gloucester Gate, although for fifteen days and more its porter had sat behind open gates; gates of bronze and gold with the Massarene arms, which the Herald's College had lately furnished, emblazoned above on their scroll-work awaiting the coronet which a grateful nation and a benign Sovereign would, no doubt, ere many years should have passed, add to them.

People of course there were by hundreds and thousands, who would have been only too glad to be bidden to their doors; but they were people of that common clay with which the Massarenes had finished for ever and aye.

There were many families, rich, if not as rich as themselves, and living in splendor on Clapham Common, near Epping Forest, or out by Sydenham and Dulwich, who would have willingly been intimate with Mrs. Massarene as their husbands were with hers in the city. She would have been content with their fine houses, their good dinners, their solid wealth, their cordial company. She would have been much more at ease in their suburban villas amidst their homelier comforts, hearing and sharing their candid boastfulness of their rise in life. But these were not the acquaintances which her husband desired. He did not want commerce, however enriched; he wanted the great world, or what now represents it, the smart world; and he intended to have that or none.

And Lady Kenilworth, their Homburg friend, had written a tiny three-cornered note ten days before, with a mouse in silver on its paper, which said: "I am in town and am coming to see you. Jack and Boo send love," and on this familiar epistle they had built up an Eiffel Tower of prodigious hope and expectation. But ten days and more had passed and their correspondent had not yet fulfilled her promise.

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Therefore, amidst all the beauty and splendor of it, the mistress of the house sat, pale, sullen, despondent, melancholy. She had sat thus for fifteen days—ever since Parliament had met—and it was all in vain, in vain. The gold urn bubbled, the shepherds smiled, the orchids bloomed, the men in black and the men in powder waited in vain, and the splendid and spacious mansion warmed itself, lighted itself, perfumed itself in vain. Nobody came.

She had dropped all her old friends and the new ones were faithless and few.

She had been forced by her lord and master to cease her acquaintance with the wives of aldermen and city magnates and magistrates; good-natured wealthy women, who had been willing to make her one of themselves; and the desired successors, the women of the world, were only conspicuous by their absence.

She was dressed admirably by a great authority on clothes; but the dull Venetian red, embroidered with gold thread and slashed with tawny color, was suited to a Vittoria Accrombona, to a Lucrezia Borgia, and did not suit at all the large loose form and the pallid insignificant features of their present wearer.

When the head cutter of the great Paris house which had turned out that magnificent gown had ventured to suggest to its chief that such attire was thrown away on such a face and figure as these, that Oracle had answered with withering contempt, "*Rien ne va aux gens de leur espèce, excepté leur tablier d'ouvrière. Et le tablier on ne veut plus porter!*"

His scorn was unutterable for all "*gens de leur espèce*," but he did what he could for them; he let them have exquisite attire and sent them very long bills. It was not his fault if they never knew how to wear their clothes; he could not teach them that secret, which only comes by the magic of nature and breeding. The present wearer of his beautiful Venetian red and gold gown was laced in until she could scarcely breathe; her fat hands were covered with beautiful rings; her grey hair had been washed with gold-colored dye; her broad big feet, which had stood so many years before cooking stoves and washtubs, were

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encased in Venetian red hose of silk and black satin shoes with gold buckles; her maid had assured her that she looked like a picture but she felt like a guy, and was made nervous by the Medusa-like gaze of the men in black who occasionally flitted across her boudoir to attend to a lamp, contract the valve of the *calorifère*, or lay the afternoon papers cut and aired by her chair.

"If only they wouldn't look at me so!" she thought, piteously. What must they think of her, sitting alone like this, day after day, week after week, when the dreary two hours' drive in the Park was over, behind the high-stepping horses, which were the envy of all beholders, but to their owners seemed strange, terrible and dangerous creatures.

London was full, not with the suffocating fullness indeed of July, but with the comparative animation which comes into the street with the meeting of Parliament.

But not a soul had passed those gates as yet, at least not one as human souls had of late become classified in the estimation of the dwellers within them.

The beautiful rooms seemed to yawn like persons whose mind and whose time are vacant. The men in black and the men in powder yawned also, and bore upon their faces the visible expression of that depression and discontent which were in their bosoms at the sense, ever increasing in them, that every additional day in the house of people whom nobody knew, robbed them of caste, injured their prestige, and ruined their future.

The mistress of the palace only did not yawn because she was too agitated, too nervous and disappointed and unhappy to be capable of such a minor suffering a *ennui*; she was not dull because she was strung up to a high state of anxious expectation, gradually subsiding, as day after day went on, to a complete despair.

They had done all that could be done in the way of getting into society; they had neglected no means, shunned no humiliation, spared no expense, refused no subscription, avoided no insult which could possibly, directly or indirectly, have helped them to enter its charmed circle, and yet nothing had succeeded. Nobody came, nobody at least out of that mystic and magic sphere

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into which they pined and slaved to force or to insinuate themselves; not one of those, the dust of whose feet they were ready to kiss, would come up the staircase under the smiling gaze of Clodion's young falconer.

But on this second day of the month of March, when the clocks showed five of the afternoon, there was a slight movement perceptible in the rooms of which the suite was visible from the door of the boudoir. The groom of the chambers, a slender, solemn, erect personage, by name Winter, came forward with a shade of genuine respect for the first time shown in his expression and demeanor.

"Lady Kenilworth asks if you receive, madam?"

"Why, lord, man! ain't I in o' purpose?" said his mistress, in her agitation and surprise reverting to her natural vernacular; whilst she rose in vast excitement and unspeakable trepidation, and tumbled against a stool in her nervousness.

"I was sure that I should find you at home, so I followed on the heels of your man," said a sweet, silvery, impertinent voice, as the fair young mother of Jack and Boo entered the boudoir, looking at everything about her in a bird-like way, and with an eye-glass which she did not want lifted to the bridge of her small and delicate nose.

"So kind—so kind—so honored," murmured Mrs. Massarene with bewilderment and enthusiasm; her pale, flaccid cheeks warm with pleasure, and her voice tremulous with timidity.

"Not at all," murmured Lady Kenilworth absently and vaguely, occupied with her inspection of the objects round her. She seated herself on a low chair, and let her glance wander over the walls, the ceiling, the Meissen china, the Watteau ceiling, and her hostess's gown.

"How's your dear little children, ma'am?" said Mrs. Massarene humbly.

"Oh, they're all right, thanks," said their mother carelessly, her head thrown back as she gazed up at the Watteau. "It seems very well done," she said at last. "Who did it for you? The Bond Street people?"

"Did what?" said her hostess falteringly, drawing in her breath with a sudden little gasp to prevent herself from saying "my lady."

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"The whole thing," explained her guest, pointing with the handle of her eye-glass toward the vista of the rooms.

"The—the—house?" said Mrs. Massarene hesitatingly, still not understanding. "We bought it—that is, Mr. Massarene bought it—and Prince Kristof of Karstein was so good as to see to the decorations and the furniture. The duke had left a-many fixtures."

"Prin and Kris?" repeated Lady Kenilworth, hearing imperfectly through indifference to the subject and attention to the old Saxe around her. "I never heard of them. Are they a London firm?"

"Prince Kristof of Karstein," repeated Mrs. Massarene, distressed to find the name misunderstood. "He is a great friend of ours. I think your ladyship saw him with us in Paris last autumn."

Lady Kenilworth opened wide her pretty, innocent, impertinent, forget-me-not colored eyes.

"What, old Khris? Khris Kar? Did he do it all for you? Oh, I must run about and look at it all, if he did it!" she said, as she jumped from her seat, and, without any premiss or permission, began a tour of the rooms, sweeping swiftly from one thing to another, lingering momentarily here and there, agile and restless as a squirrel, yet soft in movement as a swan. She did run about, flitting from one room to another, studying, appraising, censuring, admiring, all in a rapid and cursory way, but with that familiarity with what she saw, and that accurate eye for what was good in it, which the mistress of all these excellent and beautiful things would live to the end of her years without acquiring.

She put up her eye-glass at the pictures, fingered the tapestries, turned the porcelains upside down to see their marks, flitted from one thing to another, knew every orchid and odontoglossum by its seven-leagued name, and only looked disapproval before a Mantegna exceedingly archaic and black, and a Pietro di Cortona ceiling which seemed to her florid and doubtful.

She went from reception-rooms to library, dining-room, conservatories, with drawing-rooms, morning-rooms, studies, bed-chambers, galleries, bath-rooms, as swift as a swallow and as keen of glance as a falcon, touching a

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stuff, eyeing a bit of china, taking up a bibelot, with just the same pretty pecking action as a chaffinch has in an orchard, or a pigeon in a bean-field. Everything was really admirable and genuine. All the while she paid not the slightest attention to the owner of the house, who followed her anxiously and humbly, not daring to ask a question, and panting in her tight corset at the speed of her going, but basking in the sense of her visitor's rank as a cat basks in the light and warmth of a coal fire and a fur-lined basket.

Not a syllable did Lady Kenilworth deign to cast to her in her breathless scamper through the house. She had some solid knowledge of value in matters of art, and she begrudged these delicious things to the woman with the face like a large unbaked loaf and the fat big hands, as her four-year-old Boo had begrudged the gold box.

"Really they say there is a Providence above us, but I can't think there is, when I am pestered to death by bills, and this creature owns Harrenden House;" she thought, with those doubts as to the existence of a deity which always assail people when deity is, as it were, in the betting against them. She had read an article that morning by Jules Simon, in which he argued that if the anarchists could be only persuaded to believe in a future life they would turn their bombs into bottles of kid reviver and cheerfully black the boots of the bourgeoisie. But she felt herself that there was something utterly wrong in a scheme of creation which could bestow Harrenden House on a Margaret Massarene, and in a Divine Judge who could look on at such discrepancies of property without disapproval.

She scarcely said a syllable in her breathless progress over the building; although the unhappy mistress of Harrenden House pined in trembling for her verdict, as a poor captain of a company longs for a word from some great general inspecting his quarters. But when she had finished her tour of inspection, and consented to take a cup of tea and a caviare biscuit in the tea-room where the Leo the Tenth urn was purring, and Mr. Winter and two of his subordinates were looking on in benign condescension, she said brusquely:

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"*Eh bien, il ne vous a pas volé.*"

Mrs. Massarene had not the most remote idea of what she meant, but smiled vaguely, and anxiously, hoping the phrase meant praise.

"He's given you the value of your money," Lady Kenilworth explained. "It's the finest house in London, and nearly everything in it is good. The Mantegna is rubbish, as I told you, and if I had been asked I shouldn't have put up that Pietro di Cortona. What did Khris make you pay for it?"

"I don't know, I am sure, ma'am," replied the mistress of the Mantegna meekly. "William—Mr. Massarene—never tells me the figure of anything."

"The Cortona was painted last year in the Avenue de Villiers, I suspect," continued Lady Kenilworth. "But all the rest, or nearly all, is admirable."

"It's a very grand house," replied its mistress meekly; "but it's mighty lonesome-like to be in it, with no company. If all the great folks you promised, my lady——"

"I never promised, I never do promise," said her visitor sharply. "I can't take people by their petticoats and coat-tails and drag them up your stairs. You must get yourself known for something; then they'll come. What? Oh, I have no idea. Something. A cook; or a wine; or a surprise. People like surprises under their dinner napkins. Or a speciality, any speciality. I knew a person who entirely got into society by white hares; *civet de lièvre*, you know; but white, Siberian."

Mrs. Massarene gasped. She had a feeling then she was being talked to in Sanscrit or Welsh and expected to understand it. Why white hares should be better than brown hares she could not imagine. Nobody ate the fur.

"But you was so good as to say when we were in Paris, ma'am——"

"Never remind me of anything I said. I can't endure it! I believe you want to get in the swim, don't you?"

"Please, I don't quite understand, ma'am."

Her visitor was silently finishing nibbling at a caviare biscuit and reflecting what a goose she had been to go to Egypt instead of utilizing this Massarene vein. She must certainly, she thought, do all she could for these people.

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"You're Catholic, aren't you?" she said abruptly.

The horror of an Ulster woman spread itself over the flaccid and pallid clay in which the features of her hostess were moulded.

"Oh no, my lady, we were never Romans," she said, so aghast that she was carried out of herself into the phraseology of her earlier years. "We were never Romans. How could you think it of us?"

"It would be better for you if you were," said Lady Kenilworth unfeelingly and irreverently. "Catholics are *chic;* and then all the great Catholic families push a convert unanimously. They'd get a sweep to all the best houses if he only went often enough to the Oratory."

"We've always been loyal people," murmured Mrs. Massarene piteously; "always Orange as Orange could be."

"Loyalty's nothing," said Lady Kenilworth, contemptuously eyeing the beautiful gold urn with the envious appreciation of a dealer's glance. "Loyalty don't 'take the cake.' Nobody is afraid of it. It's all fear now that we go by——"

"And gain," she was about to add but checked the words unuttered.

"I wish you were Catholic," she said instead. "It would make everything so much smoother for you. I suppose you couldn't change? They'd make it very easy for you."

Margaret Massarene gasped. Life had unfolded many possibilities to her of which she had never dreamed; but never such a possibility as this.

"Couldn't you?" said her guest sharply. "After all, it's nothing to do. The Archbishop would see to it all for you. They make it very easy where there is plenty of money."

"I don't think I could, my lady; it would be eternal punishment for me in the world to come," said Mrs. Massarene faintly, whilst her groom of the chambers restrained a violent inclination to box her on the ears for the vulgarity of her two last words.

He had been long trained in the necessary art of banishing from his countenance every ray of expression, every

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shadow of indication that he overheard what was said around him, but nature for once prevailed over training; deep and unutterable disgust was spoken on his bland yet austere features. Eternal punishment! did the creature think that Harrenden House was a Methody chapel?

As for Lady Kenilworth, she went into a long and joyous peal of laughter; laughed till the tears brimmed over in her pretty ingenuous turquoise-colored eyes.

"Oh, my good woman," she said, as soon as she could speak, good-humoredly and contemptuously, "you don't mean to say that you believe in eternal punishment? What is the use of getting old Khris to furnish for you and ask me to show you the way about, if you weigh yourself down with such an old-fashioned funny packful of antiquated ideas as that? You must not say such things really; you will never get on amongst us if you do."

The countenance of Margaret Massarene grew piteous to behold; she was a feeble woman, but obstinate; she was ready to sell her soul to "get on," but the ghastly terrors inculcated to her in her childhood were too strongly embedded in her timid and apprehensive nature to leave her a free agent.

"Anything else, ma'am—anything else," she murmured wretchedly. "But not Romanism, not Papistry. You don't know what it means to me, you don't indeed."

Lady Kenilworth shrugged her shoulders and got up from the tea-table.

"I always said," she observed slightingly, "that the Orange people were the real difficulty in Ireland. There would never have been any trouble without them."

"But you are not a Papist yourself, my lady?" asked Mrs. Massarene with trembling accents.

"Oh, I? no," said the pretty young woman with the same contemptuous and indifferent tone. "*We* can't change. We must stick to the mast—fall with the colors—die in the breach—all that kind of thing. We can't turn and twist about. But you new people can, and you are geese if you don't. You want to get in the swim. Well, if you're wise you'll take the first swimming-belt that you can get. But do just as you like, it does not

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matter to me. I am afraid I must go now, I have half a hundred things to do."

She glanced at the watch in her bracelet and drew up her feather boa to her throat. Tears rose to the pale gray eyes of her hostess.

"Pray don't be offended with me, my lady," she said timidly. "I hoped, I thought, perhaps you'd be so very kind and condescending as to tell me what to do; things bewilder me, and nobody comes. Couldn't you spare me a minute more in the boudoir yonder? where these men won't hear us," she added in a whisper.

She could not emulate her guest's patrician indifference to the presence of the men in black; it seemed to her quite frightful to discuss religious and social matters beneath the stony glare of Mr. Winter and his colleagues. But Lady Kenilworth could not share or indulge such sentiments, nor would she consent to take any such precautions.

She seated herself where she had been before by the tea-table, her eyes always fascinated by the Leo the Tenth urn. She took a bonbon and nibbled it prettily, as a squirrel may nibble a filbert.

"Tell me what you want," she said bluntly; she was often blunt, but she was always graceful.

Margaret Massarene glanced uneasily at Winter and his subordinates, and wished that she could have dared to order them out of earshot, as she would have done with a red-armed and red-haired maid-of-all-work who had marked her first stage on the steep slopes of "gentility."

"You told us at Homburg, my lady——" she began timidly.

"Don't say 'my lady,' whatever you do."

"I beg your pardon, my—yes, ma'am—no ma'am—I beg pardon—you were so good as to tell Willlam and me at the baths that you would help us to get on in London if we took a big house and bought that place in Woldshire. We've done both them things, but we don't get on; nobody comes nigh us here nor there."

She heaved a heart-broken sigh which lifted and depressed the gold embroideries on her ample bosom.

Lady Kenilworth smiled unsympathetically.

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"What can you expect, my good woman?" she murmured. "People don't call on people whom they don't know; and you don't know anybody except my husband and old Khris and myself."

It was only too true. Mrs. Massarene sighed.

"But I thought as how your la—, as how you would be so very, very good as to——"

"I am not a bear-leader," said Lady Kenilworth with hauteur. Mrs. Massarene was as helpless and as flurried as a fish landed on a grassy bank with a barbed hook through its gills. There was a long and to her a torturing silence. The water hissed gently, like a purring cat, in the vase of Leo the Tenth, and Mouse Kenilworth looked at it as a woman of Egypt may have gazed at a statue of Pascht.

It seemed a visible symbol of the immense wealth of these Massarene people, of all the advantages which she herself might derive therefrom, of the unwisdom of allowing their tutelage to lapse into other hands than theirs. If she did not launch them on the tide of fashion others would do so, and others would gain by it all that she would lose by not doing it. She was a woman well born and well bred, and proud by temperament and by habit, and the part she was moved to play was disagreeable to her, even odious. But it was yet one which in a way allured her, which drew her by her necessities against her will; and the golden water-vase seemed to say to her with the voice of a deity, "Gold is the only power left in life." She herself commanded all other charms and sorceries; but she did not command that.

She was silent some moments whilst the pale eyes of her hostess watched her piteously and pleadingly.

She felt that she had made a mistake, but she did not know what it was nor how to rectify it.

"I beg pardon, ma'am," she said humbly; "I understood you to say as how you would introduce me to your family and friends in town and in the country. I didn't mean any offence—indeed, indeed, I didn't."

"And none is taken," said Lady Kenilworth graciously, thinking to herself, "One must suit oneself to one's com-

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pany. That's how they talk, I believe, in the servants' hall, where she ought to be."

Aloud she continued:

"You see, whatever one says at Homburg, or indeed anywhere at all out of England, does not count *in* England: that is understood everywhere by everybody."

"Really," murmured Mrs. Massarene, confused and crestfallen: for it had been on the faith of this fair lady's promises and predictions in the past summer that Harrenden House and Vale Royal had been purchased.

"Of course," said Lady Kenilworth rather tartly, still looking at the gold water-vase, which exercised a strange fascination over her, as if it were a fetish which she was compelled, *nolens volens*, to worship. "Only imagine what a mob we should have round us at home if every one we were civil to in Nice and Florence and Homburg and Ostend, and all the other places, could take us seriously and expect to be invited by us *here*. It would be frightful."

Margaret Massarene sighed: existence seemed to her complicated and difficult to an extent which she could never have credited in the days when she had carried her milking-pails to and from the rich grass meadows of her old home in Ulster. In those remote and simple days "I'll be glad to see you" meant "I shall be glad," and when you ate out of your neighbor's potato bowl, your neighbor had a natural right to eat in return out of yours —a right never disavowed. But in the great world these rules of veracity and reciprocity seemed unknown. Lady Kenilworth sat lost in thought some moments, playing with the ends of her feather boa and thinking whether the game were worth the candle. It would be such a dreadful bore!

Then there came before her mind's eyes the sum total of many unpaid bills, and the vision of that infinite sweetness which lies in renewed and unlimited credit.

"You want to be *lancée?*" she said at last in her brusque yet graceful manner suddenly, as she withdrew her gaze from the tea-table, "Well, sometimes to succeed socially is very easy and sometimes it is very difficult—for new people very difficult. Society is always uncertain.

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It acts on no fixed principles. It keeps out A. and lets in B., and couldn't possibly say why it does either. Your money alone won't help you. There are such swarms of rich persons, and everybody who gets rich wants the same thing. You are, I believe, enormously rich, but there are a good many enormously rich. The world is in a queer state; ninety out of a hundred have nothing but debts, the other ten are gorged on money, gorged; it is very queer. Something is wrong. The sense of proportion has gone out of life altogether. You want, you say, to know people. Well, I can let you see them; you can come and meet them at my house; but I can't make them take you up if they won't do it."

Mrs. Massarene sighed. She dared not say so, but she thought—of what use had been all the sums flung away at this lovely lady's bidding in the previous autumn?

"It is no use to waste time on the idiot," reflected her visitor. "She don't understand a word one says, and she thinks they can buy Society as if it were a penny bun. Old Billy's sharper; I wonder he had not the sense to divorce her in the States, or wherever they come from."

"Where's your man?" she said impatiently.

"William's in the City, my lady," answered Mrs. Massarene proudly. "William, ma'am, is very much thought of in the City."

"He's on lots of things, I suppose?"

After some moments' puzzled reflection his wife replied, "Meaning Boards, ma'am? Yes, he is. They seem they can't do without him. William had always a wonderful head for business."

"Ah!" said Lady Kenilworth. "He must put Cocky on some good things. My husband, you know. Everything is done by companies nowadays. Even the Derby favorite is owned by a syndicate. Tell him to put Lord Kenilworth on all his good things, and not to mind if he's unpunctual. Lord Kenilworth never can understand why half-past two isn't the same hour as twelve."

"That won't do in business, my lady," said Mrs. Massarene boldly, for here she was sure of her ground. "Five minutes late writes ruin sometimes."

"Does it indeed? I suppose that's what makes it so

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fetching. I am sure it would do Cocky worlds of good; wake him up; give him things to think of."

"Is my lord a business man, ma'am?" said Mrs. Massarene, with great doubt in her tone.

"Oh, they all are now, you know. Cocky's very lazy, but he's very clever."

"My lord don't want to be clever; he'll be duke," said Mrs. Massarene, intending no sarcasm. "I can't think, ma'am, as your noble husband would like to toil and moil in the City."

"No—no; but to be on things, you know," answered her visitor vaguely. "You send Mr. Massarene to me and we'll talk about it. He musn't mind if Lord Kenilworth only gives his name and never shows."

Mrs. Massarene's was a slow brain and a dull one, but she was not really stupid; in some matters she was shrewd, and she began dimly to perceive what was expected of her and her William, and what *quid pro quo* would be demanded by this lovely lady who had the keys of society if she used any of these keys in their favor; she had had glimmerings of this before, but it had never presented itself before her so clearly as now. She had sense enough, however, to keep the discovery to herself. "I'll tell Mr. Massarene, ma'am," she said meekly, "and I know he'll be very proud to wait on you. Shall it be to-morrow?"

"Yes; to-morrow, before luncheon. About half-past twelve."

"I won't forget, ma'am."

"And I'll come and dine with you next week. I'll bring some people, my sisters; they won't mind, Carrie certainly won't. Lady Wisbeach, you know. What day? Oh, I don't know. I must go home and look at my book. I think there is something of no importance that I can throw over next week."

"And how many will be there at dinner, ma'am," asked Mrs. Massarene, feeling hot all over, as she would have expressed it, at the prospect of this banquet.

"Oh, well, I can't say. I'll see who will come. You have a very good *chef*, haven't you? If not I could get you Van Holstein's. You know when people are well fed once they'll come to be fed again, and they tell others."

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"Just like fowls," murmured Mrs. Massarene, her mind reverting to the poultry yard of her youth, with the hens running over and upsetting each other in their haste to get to the meal-pan.

She was sensible of an awakening interest of a warmer tinge in the manner of her protectress, since the subject of good things in the City had been broached.

"You mustn't want to go too fast at once," continued that fair lady. "It's like cycling. You'll wobble about and get a good many falls at first. But you've begun well. You've a beautiful house, and you have my cousin's place, in the heart of a hunting county. Several of the county people have asked me about the purchaser of Vale Royal, and I have always said something nice about you both. You know I have been four months on the Nile, and one sees the whole world there; such a climate as this is to return to after Egypt! Why weren't you in Egypt? Oh, I forgot; your man's member for Limehouse, isn't he? I wonder the party hasn't done more for you. But, you see, money alone, unless there is tact—— Well, I daresay I can't make you understand if I talk till doomsday; I have two or three people the night after to-morrow. I will send you a card. And, by the way, you had better tell Khris to call on me if he be in town. I will talk over with him what we can do for you."

Mr. Winter, standing within earshot, at a discreet distance, to all appearance as bereft of sight and hearing, and impervious as a statue to all sight and sounds, lost not a syllable uttered by Lady Kenilworth, and approved of all. "It is clever of her," he thought, "to be ready to go halves in the spoils with that old prince. Meet him half way, she does; mighty clever that; she'll cut his claws and draw his teeth. She's a lady of the right sort, she is. If she weren't quite so clever she'd have him jealous of him and have made an enemy of him at the onset."

His employer meantime was exhausting her somewhat limited vocabulary in agitated thanks and protestations of undying gratitude which Lady Kenilworth nipped in the bud by giving her two fingers chillily and hurrying away, her farewell glance being cast at the golden water-vase.

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"Khris a house decorator and I a tout! How very dreadful it is! But hard times make strange trades," thought the young mother of Jack and Boo, as she sank down on the soft seat of her little brougham, and was borne swiftly away to other houses, as the lamps begun to shine through the foggy evening air.

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CHAPTER III.

MRS. MASSARENE had conducted her visitor with great obsequiousness to the head of the staircase, and would have gone down the stairs with her had not Lady Kenilworth prevented such a demonstration.

"My dear creature, pray don't! One only does that for royalty," she had said, while a repressed grin was visible through the impassive masks of all the footmen's faces where they stood above and below.

"How ever is one to know what's right and what's wrong," thought the mistress of Harrenden House, resting her hands for a moment upon the carved rail of the balustrade, and eyeing nervously the naked boy of Clodion. That statue was very terrible to her; "To set a lad without any scrap o' clothes on a-beckoning with a bird to everybody as come upstairs, I can't think as it's decent or proper," she said constantly to her husband. But a master hand had indicated the top of the staircase as the proper place for that nude young falconer to stand, in all his mingled realism and idealization; therefore, no one could be bold enough to move him elsewhere, and he leaned airily against the old choir-carving, and wore a fawn-like smile as he tossed his hawk above his head and stretched his hand outward as though to beckon the crowds, which would not come, up that silent stair.

But the crowds were coming now!

For where Lady Kenilworth pointed, the world would surely follow; and the heart of simple Margaret Massarene, late Margaret Hogan, dairymaid of Kilrathy, County Down, beat high in her breast under the red and gold of her gorgeous bodice. "It's mighty hard work being a lady," she thought, "but since I've got to be one, I'd like to go the whole hog, and show Kathleen when she comes back to us that we are as smart gentlefolks as any of her friends."

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When Mr. Massarene came home to dinner that evening, his wife felt that she had great news to give him.

"I think she'll take us up, William," she said, almost under her breath. "But I think she'll want a lot of palm-grease."

She was a simple woman, of coarse views and expressions.

"Whatever my lady wants she shall have," reflected her husband, but his heavy brows frowned; for he was a man who did not like even the wife of his bosom to see into his intentions, and if he were going to buy his way into that society where his shooting-irons were of no use to him, he did not care for even the "old 'ooman" to know it.

But the next day, at one o'clock precisely, he presented himself at the house in Stanhope Street which the Kenilworths honored by residence. He looked like an eminently respectable grazier or cheesemonger clothed in the best that money could buy; a hat, which was oppressively lustrous and new, was carried in his hand with a pair of new gloves. In his shirt-sleeves and butcher-boots, with a brace of revolvers in his belt, as he had sworn at his plate-layers, or his diggers, or his puddlers, in the hard bright light of the Dakotan sun, he had been a formidable and manly figure in keeping with the giant rocks, and the seething streams, and the rough boulder-strewn roads of the country round him. But standing in the hall of a London house, clad in London clothes made by the first tailors, he looked clumsy and absurd, and he knew it. He was a stolid, sensible, and very bold man; when a railway train in the early days of the Pacific road had been "held up" by a native gang, those desperate robbers had found more than their match in him, and the whole convoy, with the million odd dollars he was carrying in his breast-pocket, had been saved by his own ready and pitiless courage. But as he mounted the staircase in Stanhope Street his knees shook and his tongue clove to his teeth; he felt what actors describe as stage fright.

Lady Kenilworth had deigned to know him at Homburg, had put him in the way of buying Vale Royal of her cousin Roxhall, had dined more than once at his ex-

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pense with a noisy gay party who scarcely said good-day to him, and likewise at his expense had picnicked in the woods and drunk much more of the best Rhenish wines than were good for them; and on a smooth stretch of green sward under the pines, that lovely lady had imitated the dancing of Nini-Patte-en-l'air of the Eden Theatre, until the "few last sad grey hairs" upon his head had stood erect in scandalized amazement. She had also dined and supped at his expense several times with various friends of her own in Paris, in the November following on the July at Homburg; and she had let him take boxes for her at the operas and theatres, and had generally used his purse without seeming to see that it was open for her. But he had exchanged very few words with her (though he had already through her inspiration spent a good deal of money), and his stout, squat figure shook like a leaf as he was ushered into her presence, while her two Blenheims flew at his trousers with a fugue of barks.

What a dazzling vision she was, as she smiled on him across the flower-filled and perfumed space which divided them! She had smiled like that when she had first spoken to him of buying Vale Royal in the early days of his acquaintance with her. William Massarene was no fool, and he knew that he would have to pay its full price for that enchanting smile, but though he was not its dupe he was its victim. He was nervous as he had never been when he had heard the order, "Hands up!" in the solitude of a mountain gorge at midnight amongst the Rockies.

The smile was encouraging, but the rest of the attitude was serene, almost severe, as pure as a Virgin in a tryptich of Van der Goes; she was at work on some embroidery; she had Boo on a stool at her feet; she looked an exquisite picture of youthful maternity; he could scarcely believe that he had seen her cutting those mad capers on the sward of the German forest, or heard her scream with laughter at the supper-table of Bignon's.

Boo got up on her little black-stockinged legs, ran to him, and looked at him from under her golden cloud of hair.

"What has oo brought me?" said the true child of modernity.

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"Do you remember the sweeties at the Baths, my lovely darling?" stammered Mr. Massarene, immensely touched and gratified at the child's recollection of him, and full of remorse that he had not rifled Regent Street.

"Boo always remembers her friends," said Boo's mother very pleasantly, as she delivered him from the Blenheims, and made him seat himself beside her.

"Old fat man's come as was at Ombo; but he didn't bring nothin' for us," said Boo to Jack at the nursery dinner ten minutes later. "Mammy's goin' to get somethin' 'cos she was so civil to him."

"Oo're always thinkin' of *gettin'*, Boo," said Jack, with his rosy mouth full of mashed potato.

"What's the use o' peoples else?" said his sister solemnly, picking up the roast mutton which her nurse had cut up into little dice on her plate.

Jack pondered awhile upon this question.

"I likes peoples 'cos I like 'em," he replied at last.

"You're a boy!" returned his sister with withering contempt.

A week later, Boo's mother, with a very gay and hilarious round dozen of friends, including her eldest sister, Lady Wisbeach, dined at Harrenden House, and the gentleman known as Harry took in Mrs. Massarene.

Two weeks later the Massarenes breakfasted in Stanhope Street expressly to meet an imperial grand duchess who at that time was running about London; and the grand duchess was very smiling and good-natured, and chattered volubly, and invited herself to dinner at Harrenden House.

"They do tell me," she said graciously, "that you have such a wonderful Clodion."

Three weeks later William Massarene allowed himself to be led into the purchase of a great Scotch estate of moor, seashore, and morass, in the extreme northwest of Scotland, which had come to Brancepeth through his late maternal grandmother, and which had been always considered as absolutely unsaleable on account of certain conditions attached to its purchase, and of the fact that it had been for many years ill-preserved and its sport ruined, the deer having been destroyed by crofters.

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Brancepeth, who was primitive and simple in many of his ideas, had demurred to the transaction.

"This beggar don't know anything about sport," he said to the intermediary, Mouse; "'cause he's buying a deer forest he takes for granted he'll find deer. 'Tisn't fair, you know. One ought to tell him that he'll get no more stalking there than he'd get on Woolwich Common."

"Why should you tell him anything?" said his friend. "He can ask a factor, can't he?"

"Well, but it would only be honest, you know."

"You are odiously ungrateful," said Mouse with much heat. "I might have made the man buy Black Alder of us, and I chose to get him to buy your place instead."

Brancepeth made a droll face very like what Jack would make when he kept in a naughty word for fear of his nurse. He thought to himself that the fair lady who was rating him knew very well that her share in the purchase money of Black Alder, which belonged to her lord, would have been remarkably small, whilst her share of that of Blair Airon—but there are some retorts a man who is a gentleman cannot make, however obvious and merited they may be.

"Get him to buy 'em both," he said, tossing cakes to the Blenheims. "You do what you like with the cad; turn him round your little finger. One's just as much a white elephant as t'other, and it's no use knowing sweeps unless you make 'em clean your chimneys."

"Mr. Massarene is not a cad or a sweep," said his friend in a tone of reproof. "He is a very clever man of business."

"He must be to have to think of buying Blair Airon!"

"Probably *he* will make it productive. Or if he wants big game he'll import it from the Rockies, or—or—from somewhere. What he wants is Scottish land; well, the land is there, isn't it?"

She invariably glossed over to herself these transactions which she knew very well were discreditable, and she was always extremely angry with those who failed to keep up the glamour of fiction in which she arrayed them. Con-

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science she had not, in the full sense of the word, but she had certain instincts of breeding which made some of her own actions disagreeable to her, and only supportable if they were disguised, as a courtly chemist silvered for her the tonic pills which as courtly a physician prescribed when she, who could ride all day and dance all night, desired her nervous system to be found in jeopardy.

"He buys with his eyes open. No one has misrepresented anything," she added calmly. "He can send an army of factors to look at the estate if he pleases. Pray don't be a fool, Harry; and when your bread is buttered for you don't quarrel with it."

Harry did as he was bid.

His principles were not very fine, or very strong, but they were the instincts of a gentleman. They were smothered under the unscrupulousness of a woman who had influence over him, as so many of the best feelings and qualities of men often are. Blair Airon was sold to William Massarene; and at the same period many tradesmen in Paris and London who dealt in toilettes, perfumes, jewelery, fans and *lingerie* were agreeably surprised by receiving large instalments of what was due to them from their customer, Lady Kenilworth. To what better use could barren rocks, and dreary sands, and a dull rambling old house, which dated from James IV. and stood in the full teeth of the north wind facing the Orkneys, have possibly been put than to be thus transmuted into gossamer body linen, and petticoats covered with real lace, and exquisite essences, and fairy-like shoes, with jewels worked into their kid, and court trains, with hand-woven embroideries in gold and silver on their velvet?

If William Massarene discovered that he had bought a white elephant he never said so to anyone, and no one ventured to say so to him. All new men have a mania for buying Scotch shootings, and if there was little or nothing to shoot at Blair Airon the fact served for a laugh at the clubs when the purchaser was not present. The purchaser, however, knew well that there were no deer, and that there was scarce fur or feather on the barren soil; he had not bought without first "prospecting"; he

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was too old a hand at such matters. But he had turned a deaf ear to those in his interests who had drawn his attention to the fact, and he had signed and sealed the transfer of the estate to himself without a protest.

Nobody in North Dakota it is true could ever have cheated him out of a red deer or a red cent, but then nobody in North Dakota had ever held that magic key to the entrance of good society which he so ardently coveted. He was prepared to pay very liberally to obtain that key. He was far from generous by nature, but he could be generous to extravagance when it suited him to be so.

William Massarene was a short, broad, heavily-built man, like his wife in feature, and having, like her, a muddy-pale complexion which the Sierra suns had had no force to warm and the cold blasts of the North Pacific no power to bleach. His close-shut, thin, long lips, his square jaw, and his intent gray eyes, showed, however, in his countenance, a degree of volition and of intelligence which were his portion alone, and with which hers had no likeness. He was a silent, and seemed a dull, man; but he had a clear brain and a ruthless will, and he had in its full strength that genius for making money which is independent of education and scornful of culture, yet is the only original offspring of that modern life in which education is an institution and culture is a creed.

When he had been only eighteen years of age he had married Margaret Hogan, because she was a stout strong hard-working wench, and had at once taken a steerage ticket to New York.

When he reached the United States he had gone straightway to the new settlements in North Dakota, where cities consisted of plank-walks and shingle-roof shanties, and where the inhabitants of those cities were rougher and ruder even than himself. He had scent for wealth as a thirsty steer for distant water-springs, and he said to himself: "I won't leave off till I'm second to Jay Gould."

He began very modestly by employing himself as a pig-sticker and opening a pork shop in a town called Kerosene. His wife made and fried sausages to perfection. The shop became a popular resort, and, in the back room,

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miners, diggers, cattlemen, and all the roughs for miles around came to eat sausages, and found drinks, hot as flame, and play *ad libitum*. Sometimes they staked nuggets, and lost them.

William Massarene never played, he only watched the gamblers, and when they wanted money lent it to them, or if they sold a nugget bought it. They were a wild lot who cared neither for man nor devil; but he knew how to keep them in order with his cold grey eyes and his good six-shooter. Many swore that they would kill him or rob him; but nobody ever did either, though several tried to do both.

His wife was liked; hard-worked as she was she found time to do a good turn to sick neighbors unknown to him; and more than one rough fellow spared him because she had been kind to his kids or had brought some broth to his girl. The sausage-shop in dreary, dirty, plank-made Kerosene City was the foundation of his fortune.

How the place had stunk and how it had reeked with tobacco stench and echoed with foul outcries and the blows and shots of ruined and reckless men! Margaret Massarene often dreamt of it, and when she did so dream, woke, bathed in sweat, and filled with nameless terror.

Her husband never dreamed, except when wide-awake and of his own glories.

Kerosene City had long outgrown its infancy of planks and shingles, and had expanded into a huge town crammed with factories, and tall houses, tramways and elevators and churches, sky-scraping roofs, electric railways, chemical works, fire-belching foundries, hissing, screaming, vomiting machinery, and all the many joys of modern and American civilization.

But Kerosene City, most of it Mr. Massarene's property, was but an item in the Massarene property. He had been in many trades and many speculations; he owned railway plant and cattle ranches and steam-boats and grain-depots, and docks and tramways and manufactories, and men and women and children labored for him day and night by thousands harder than the Israelites toiled for the Pharaohs.

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Everything turned to gold that he touched. He bought for little with prodigious insight and sold for much with the same intuition. No foolish scruples hampered his acquisitiveness, no weak-minded compassion ever arrested him on any road which led to his own advantage. He had never been known to relent or to regret, to give except in ostentation, or to stir a step unless self-interest suggested and self-recompense awaited it. Herbert Spencer has said that kindness and courtesy are indispensable to success: William Massarene knew better than that philosopher. He had lived amongst men, and not amongst books. In the-land of his adoption his fellows feared him as they feared no one else; his few short hard words cut them like the knotted lash of an overseer's whip. He was dreaded, obeyed, hated: that was all the feeling he cared to excite.

Whilst he remained in that country he never lived like a man of any means; he never spent a dollar on personal ease or comfort; but it was known far and wide that after Vanderbilt and Pullman the biggest pile in the States was his; his wife alone did not know it.

To the day that she sailed past Sandy Hook on her way home Margaret Massarene had never ceased to work hard and to save any red cent she could. She knew nothing of his business, of his ambitions, of his hoarded wealth; when he took a first-class cabin on a Cunard steamer and bade her get a sealskin cloak for the voyage and buy herself a handsome outfit, she was astounded.

"We'll come back great folks and buy out the old 'uns," he had said to her thirty-five years earlier, as they had meekly set down their bundles and umbrellas amongst the steerage passengers of the emigrant ship and seen the shores of Ireland fade from their sight as the day had waned. All through the thirty-five years which he had spent on alien soil he had never forgotten his object; he had lived miserably, saving and screwing, paring and hoarding, happy in the knowledge that his "pile" grew and grew and grew, a little bigger, a little broader, with every day which dawned; and when it was big enough and broad enough for him to sit on it, monarch of all which he might choose to survey, he said to his wife:

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"Marg'ret, woman, it's time to shut up the store. We'll be going home, I'm thinkin', and buyin' the old uns out. I said as I'd do it, didn't I, five-and-thirty year agone?"

And his wife, being only a woman and therefore foolish, burst out crying and threw her apron over her head.

"But the dear old folk they be dead, William; and dead be my poor babies too!"

Then her William smiled; a very rare thing to see was a smile on his tight straight lips.

"'Tisn't those old folks I'm meanin'—and ye've your daughter surely to comfort ye; we'll marry her to a lord duke."

Margaret Massarene had dried her tears knowing that weeping would not bring her back her old parents whose bones lay under the rich grass in Kilrathy, nor her little lost boys who had been killed—two in a blizzard on the cruel central plains, and one in a forest fire by a rushing herd of terrified cattle. She had dried her tears, bought her sealskins and velvets as she was bidden to do, and come eastward with her lord in all the pomp and plenty which can be purchased on a first-class ocean steamer, and when the distant line of the low green shores of Cork became visible to her, she had turned round the rings on her large fingers and patted the heavy bracelets on her wrists to make sure that both were real, and said in her own heart if only the old people had been living, if only her three boys had been there beside her, if only she could go once more a buxom girl in a cotton frock through the sweet wet grass with her milking stool! But William Massarene, as he looked at the low green shores, had no such fond and futile regrets; he set his legs wide apart and crossed his hands on the handle of his stick and said only to himself, with a pride which was fairly legitimate if its sources were foul—

"I did as I said I'd do; I've come back as I said I'd come back."

For him, the herdsman who had tramped to and fro the pastures in the falling rain, carrying a newly-dropped calf after its mother, or driving a heifer to meet the butcher's knife, had been dead and gone for five and thirty years; there was only alive now William Massarene, millionaire

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ten times over, who had the power of the purse in his pocket and meant to buy Great Britain and Ireland with it.

As yet, he had, in his own ambitious sense of the words, failed to buy them. He remained one of the obscure rich, who are unknown to fame and to princes. It was not for lack of expenditure that he had hitherto failed to gratify his social ambitions. He had not understood how to set about the matter; he had been timid and awkward; his wife had been a drag on him, and his daughter, on whom he had counted for the best of assistance, had declined to accept the office which he assigned to her. He had lost time, missed occasions, failed to advance to his goal in a manner which intensely irritated a man who had never before this been foiled or baulked in any of his plans. He had learned that the great world was not a drinking den, to be entered by "bluff," with a nugget in one hand and a revolver in the other; and in this stage of chagrin and disappointment, Lady Kenilworth held out her hand to him. He had done all that he knew how to do. He had been returned for a metropolitan division and elected to the Carlton. He and his wife had been presented at Court almost as soon as they had arrived in England. They had been invited to a few political houses. They had gone where everybody went in summer, winter, spring, and autumn. His subscriptions were many and large. His financial value was recognized by Conservative leaders. But there he remained. He was an outsider, and in this period of perplexity, disappointment, and futile aspirations to the "smart world," Lady Kenilworth, the high priestess of smartness, held out her hand to him.

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CHAPTER IV.

LADY KENILWORTH was the prettiest woman in England; her family, the Courcys of Faldon, was renowned for physical charms, and she was the loveliest of them all, exactly reproducing a famous Romney which portrayed the features of her great great grandmother.

She had eyes like forget-me-nots, a brilliantly fair skin, a purely classic profile, a mass of sunny shining hair, which needed no arts to brighten or to ripple it, and a carriage, which for airy grace and supreme distinction, had its equal nowhere among her contemporaries. Her baptismal name of Clare had been almost entirely abandoned by her relatives and friends, and she was always called by them Mouse, a nickname given her in nursery days when she pillaged her elder sisters' bonbons and made raids on the early strawberry beds, and which had gained in the course of time many variations, such as Sourisette, Petit Rat, Topinetta, Fine-ears, Liebe Mus, and any other derivative which came to the lips of her associates.

She had a mouse painted on the panels of her village cart, stamped in silver on her note paper, mounted in gold on her riding whip, cut in chrysoprase as a charm, and made of diamonds as a locket; and many and various were the forms in which the little rodent was offered to her by her adorers on New Year's Day and at Easter. She had, indeed, so identified herself with the nickname, that when she signed her name in a royal album, or to a ceremonious letter, she had great difficulty in remembering to write herself down Clare Kenilworth.

When she had been brought out at eighteen years old, she had been the idol of the season; people had stood on chairs and benches in the Park to see her drive to her first Drawing-room. It was not only her physical charms which were great, but her manner, her scornful grace, her airy hauteur, and the mixture in her expression of dare-devil audacity and childlike innocence, were fascinations

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all her own. The way she wore her clothes, the way she moved, the things she said, the challenge of her sapphire eyes, were all enchanting and indescribable. She "fetched the town" as soon as she was out in an amazing manner; and it was thought that she had thrown away her chances in an astonishing degree when it was known that she had accepted the hand of a little *mauvais sujet*, known as Cocky to all London and half Europe, who passed his time in the lowest company he could find, and was without stamina, principles, or credit. But she knew what she was about, and without giving any explanation to her people, she dismissed the best men, and decided to select the worst she could find; the worst, at least, physically and morally.

True, he always looked a gentleman, even when he was soaked in brandy and gin as the wick of a tea-kettle is soaked in spirits of wine. Cocky's hands, Cocky's profile, Cocky's slow soft voice, had always proclaimed his race, even whilst he chaffed a cabman whom he could not pay.

True, he was by courtesy Earl of Kenilworth, and would certainly be, if he outlived his father, Duke of Otterbourne; but then he was besides that and beyond that to all his world—Cocky, and a more disreputable little sinner than Cocky it would have been hard to find in the peerage or out of it.

But Cocky "suited her book"; and to the horror of her own family and the amazement of his, this radiant *débutante* selected as her partner for life this little drunkard, who had one lung already gone and who formed the whipping-boy and stalking-horse of every Radical newspaper in Great Britian.

At a garden party on the river Lord Kenilworth showed himself for once in decent society, and unfuddled by pick-me-ups and eye-openers. He walked alone with the beauty of the year under an elm avenue by the waterside, and this was their conversation:

"You won't expect much of me?" he said, with his glass in his eye, looking vaguely down the river. "My wretched health, you know; er—there's one good thing about it for you—I may kick over the bucket any day; one lung gone, you know."

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"Yes," replied his companion; "I've always heard so. But you'll let me hang on my own hook, drive my own team, won't you?"

Cocky nodded. He perfectly understood the allegorical phrases.

"Oh, Lord, yes," he made answer. "I'm a very easy-going fellow. Take my own way and let other people take theirs."

"I warn you I shall take mine," said the young beauty—she looked him full in the eyes. Cocky's own pale, drowsy eyes looked back into hers with so cynical a smile in them that for once she was disconcerted.

"Lord, what'll that matter to me?" he responded candidly. "I only marry to make the Pater come down with the flimsy. We shall have to agree over financial questions, you and I, that's all. Most married people only meet over the accounts, you know."

The young lady laughed.

"Very well, then. If you see it in that sensible light, we'll say it's concluded."

Cocky had a gleam of conscience in his brandy-soaked soul. "You might do better, you know," he said slowly. "You're awfully fetching and you're very young, and I'm—well, I'm a bad lot—and—and wretched health, you know."

"I know; but you suit me," said his companion with brevity. "I shall have the jewels, sha'n't I?"

"Yes; I've spoken to the Pater; he'll let you have 'em."

"*Tope là donc!*" she said frankly, and she held out her pretty gloved right hand. Cocky respectfully kissed the tips of her fingers. Then he grinned.

"Let's go and ask the Pater's blessing! He's over there with the Princess."

"The devil take her if she hasn't got some card up her sleeve that she don't show me," he thought as he continued to walk on beside her. "But she's awfully fetching, and she'll be great fun, and the Pater will think I'm reforming, and he'll come down with the blunt, and what a wax Beric'll be in!"

Beric was his next brother, Alberic Orme.

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Meantime the lovely and youthful creature, who brushed the grass with her bronze kid boots beside him, pursued similar reflections.

"He don't look as if he'd live a year; and he's too far gone to bother me much, and such a *crêtin* as that Harry won't mind, and the vulture's egg is worth a little worry."

Her relatives, and especially her eldest brother, were horrified by her decision; but their persuasions and their entreaties were as ineffectual as their condemnation.

"He will let me do as I like, and I shall have the vulture's egg," she invariably answered. The vulture's egg was a great diamond, so called, which, while it had been in the possession of each succeeding Duchess of Otterbourne, had rendered her the envied of all her sex. One of the family, present at the battle of Plassy, as a volunteer, had taken it from the turban of a native prince whom he had slain. It was a yellow diamond of great size and effulgence; and if she married Cocky she could, she hoped, wear it at once, as his mother had been dead many years.

"You marry that little wretch for the sake of that looted jewel!" said her brother Hurstmanceaux, furious.

"Many people don't marry anything half as nice as a jewel," she replied calmly, and she persisted and did give her hand to the sickly little man with a classic profile and a ruined constitution, of whom his own father was ashamed.

Cocky was a slight, pale, feminine-looking person, with very light eyes, which were usually without any expression at all in them, but now and then at rare intervals could flash with a steely sharpness. His wife knew those electric flashes of those colorless orbs, and was as afraid of them as it was possible to the intrepid nature of a Courcy of Faldon to be ever afraid.

Cocky, however, possessed some excellent qualities. Other men were garrulous and confidential after drinking; but the more Cocky drank the more wary and the more silent he became. The tacit compact they made on that day of their betrothal, when they had walked beside the Thames together, was never broken on her side or his. They never interfered with each other, and they were at

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times almost cordial allies when it was a question of playing into each other's hands against some detested third person, or of deriving some mutual advantage from some mutual concessions.

He usually let her have her own way as she had stipulated, for it was the easiest and most profitable way for himself.

He was very lazy and wholly unscrupulous. Many thousands of pounds of good money had been spent on his education; tutors of the best intellect and the best morals had trained him from seven to twenty-one: his father, though a vain man, was of immaculate honor; every kind of inducement and pressure was put on him to be a worthy representative of a noble name; and nature had given him plenty of brains. Yet, so pigheaded is human nature, or so faulty is the English system of patrician education, that Cocky, for all practical result to his bringing up, might have been reared in a taproom and have matriculated in a thieves' quarter.

"Queer, monstrous queer," thought his father often, with an agony of irritation and regret. "Train a child in the way he should go and hang me if he won't go just t'other way to spite you."

Cocky was a very old child at the time of his marriage; he was thirty-seven years of age, with his thin, fair hair turning very grey, and one lung nearly gone as he had declared; but he did not evince the slightest desire to reform, and he took money in all ways, good, bad, and indifferent, in which it offered itself to him.

"What a man to leave behind one!" thought Otterbourne very often, with real shame and sorrow at his heart.

He was himself a very good man, and a gentleman to the marrow of his bones; his vanities were harmless, and his little airs of youth were not ridiculous because he was still very handsome and well preserved.

By what horrible fatality, he often asked himself, was Cocky the heir of his dukedom? He had three other sons, all men of admirable conduct and health, both moral and physical. By what extraordinary irony and brutality of fate had his eldest son, who had enjoyed every possible benefit from early training and good influences, become

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what he was? His wife had been a saint, and, for the first ten years of his life Cocky had been as pretty and promising a boy as ever rejoiced the heart of parents.

She had given birth to the four charming little children whose names were recorded in Burke, and who were admired by all the women they met when they toddled along the sunny side of the Park, or drove in their basket carriage behind their two sleek donkeys with Jack holding the reins and a groom walking at the asses' heads.

They were pretty babies, dear little men and women, with big black eyes and golden masses of hair, and skins as soft and as fair as blush-roses; she was fond of them but they could not have much space in her life, it had been already so very full when they had come into it. She had never a moment to herself unless it were the time of meditation which her bath gave her, or the minutes in which, alone in her little brougham, she rushed from one house to another.

Cocky went about with his wife quite often enough to set a good example. Not into society indeed, Cocky had a society of his own to which he was faithful, but he was always there when wanted—in the London house, in the country houses, in the Paris hotel, at the German bath—he was always there in the background, a shadowy presence letting himself in and out with noiseless and discreet footsteps, a permanent sanction and indisputable guarantee that all was as it should be, and that Lady Kenilworth, with the big diamond of his House on her fair bosom, could attend a Drawing-room or a State ball whenever she chose. He really kept his part of the compact with a loyalty which better men might have not shown, for better men would not have had his inducements or his patience to do so.

Their financial embarrassments were chronic, but never interfered with their expenditure. Money was always got somehow for anything that they really wished to do. They were at all places in their due season, and their own houses never saw them except when there was a house-party to be entertained, or a royal visit to be received. True Cocky on such occasions was usually indisposed and unseen, but that fact did not greatly matter to anyone.

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It was an understood thing in society that he had motor ataxy, a very capricious disease as everyone knows; putting you in purgatory one day and letting you sup with ballet-girls the next. And Cocky had this useful faculty of the well-born and naturally well-bred man that he could, when he chose, pull himself out of the slough, remember his manners, and behave as became his race. But it bored him excruciatingly, and the effort was brief.

The marriage, on a whole, if they had not been continually in difficulties about money, might fairly have been called as happy as most marriages are. When they quarreled it was in private, and when they combined they were dangerous to their families.

She knew that she was never likely ever again to find anyone quite so reasonable, quite so useful as he.

He had, immediately on their marriage, been on very good terms with her friend Harry; and when there was later on question of other friends beside Harry he did not feel half so much irritation at the fact as did Harry himself.

He had learned what card it had been which she had kept up her sleeve when she had spoken with such apparent frankness as she had walked along the grass path by the Thames. But he had never made a fuss about it. He really thought Harry a very good fellow though "deuced poor, deuced poor," he said sometimes shaking his head.

Harry, too, was useful and unobtrusive, always ready to get theatre stalls, or make up a supper party, or row the stablemen if the horses got out of form, or go on beforehand to see the right rooms were taken at Homburg or Biarritz, or Nice. A good-natured fellow, too, was Harry; sort of fellow who would pawn his last shirt for you if he liked you. Cocky always nodded to him, and used his cigar-case, and sauntered with him for appearance sake down Pall Mall or Piccadilly in the most amicable manner possible.

Cocky was a nursery nickname which had gone with him to Eton, and from Eton into the world, and Kenny was an abbreviation of his courtesy title which was unfortunately in use even amongst the cabmen, policemen, crossing-sweepers, and match-sellers of that district of

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Mayfair where he dwelt whilst awaiting the inheritance of Otterbourne House.

"Jump in, boy," said the driver of a hansom to a telegraph lad, who had hailed him at the same time as Lord Kenilworth. "Jump in, a growler's good enough for Kenny. He wants to get slow over the ground to give my lady time with her fancy man."

There was something about him which made all manly men, of whatever class, from cabdrivers to his own brothers and brother-in-law, perpetually desire to kick him. He knew that men wished to kick him; and he did not try to kick them in return. He wore his degradation smilingly, as if it were an Order.

"That is the utterly hopeless thing about him," said his father once.

The Ormes had always been great people—true, staunch, polished gentlemen, holding a great stake in the country, and holding it worthily, riding straight, and living honorably. By what caprice of chance, what irony of fate, had this stalwart and high-principled race produced such a depraved and degenerate being as Cocky?

"There must be something very wrong in our social system that so many of our men of position are no sounder than rotten apples," the duke said once to a person, who replied that there were black sheep in all countries. "Yes, but our black sheep are labeled prize rams," replied Otterbourne.

The four little children in the nurseries did not give him much consolation. The gossip of society hung over them like a cloud in his sight, and there were none of those dark sleepy eyes in his family portraits at Staghurst.

"There are no black-eyed Ormes in our family portraits," he said once to his eldest son; and Cocky's face wore for an instant a droll expression, and his left eye winked. But it was only for an instant.

"There's a legend," he said, rolling a cigarette; "Richard Orme married a gipsy in William Rufus's time. Lord, who shall say to where the brats throw back?"

"Who indeed?" said the duke with a significance which penetrated even the Cognac-sodden brains of his heir.

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But the legend did really exist, and when the children's mother heard of the gipsy of William Rufus's time she thought the legend a very interesting one and very useful.

But who could blame Cocky's wife for anything? Besides, the duke was of that old English temper, now grown so rare, which thought dishonor carried into a law court was only made much worse by the process, and was painfully conscious that Kenilworth, although he looked like a gentleman, spoke like one, moved like one, and wore his clothes like one, was in many sorrowful respects a cad. But a clever cad! Yes, Cocky was clever by nature, if not by study; that was perhaps the very worst part of the whole matter. He could play the fool—did play it almost perpetually—but he had not been born a fool.

There was not even that excuse for him.

He was a man of considerable intelligence, whom indolence, depravity, and disinclination to take trouble had made approach very nearly to an idiot. But, as his mind had odd nooks and corners in it, which contained out-of-the-way scraps of learning sometimes profound, so his character had, occasionally, spasms in it of resolve and of volition, which showed that he might have been a different person to the mere nonentity and lounger that he was, if he had been forced to work for his living. As it was he was the butt of his friends, the torture of his father, the ridicule of his wife, and the favorite whipping-boy of the press and public, when they wanted indirectly to slate a prince or directly to pillory an order. As a gun loaded to the muzzle, which could at any moment be discharged with deadly effect at the Upper House, he was unspeakably dear to the Radicals.

One day, in a Hyde Park meeting met to howl against the Lords, Cocky, who was riding his cob down the road past the Achilles, heard his own name spoken, and his fitness for an hereditary legislator irreverently denied. He stopped to listen, putting his glass in his eye to see his adversaries.

"My good people, you are all wrong," he called to them at a pause in the oration. "I'm a commoner. Plain

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John Orme, without a shilling to bless myself with. Don't suppose I shall ever live to get into the Lords. The Pater's lungs are much sounder than mine, and his politics too; for he'd trounce you all round, and give each of you a horse-drench."

So oddly constituted are mobs, that this one laughed and cheered him for the speech, and Cocky, much diverted, got off his cob in Hamilton Place, at the Batchelor's Club, and went to refresh his throat with a glass of brandy.

It was his sole appearance in public life.

"Told 'em you'd give each of 'em a horse-drench," he said with a faint chuckle, the next time he saw his father.

"Thanks," said Otterbourne; "and if they break my windows the next time they're out, will you pay for the glazier?"

"Never pay for anything," said Cocky, solemnly and truthfully. And it was probably the only truthful word that he had spoken for many years.

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CHAPTER V.

"RONNIE," said Mouse to her elder brother one morning, "I don't think I've ever told you about those new people to whom Gerald sold Vale Royal———"

"To whom *you* sold Vale Royal," said Lord Hurstmanceaux with curt significance.

She colored; she did not like her brother's rough and blunt ways of putting things, though it was a Courcy habit into which she herself lapsed in cynical and imprudent moments.

She let the subject pass, however, and continued as if she had not heard the correction.

"They are such fun; you can't imagine how delightful they are; and they have made Harrenden House a paradise. When I came from Cairo they were already in it. Old Prince Khris had done it all."

"There are a good many such dollar-lined paradises in London," said Hurstmanceaux. "I'd rather you didn't go into them. But, of course, you do as you like."

"Of course I do! Old Khris arranged the house for them."

Hurstmanceaux laughed.

"Khris and you! They will be warm people indeed if they have even a *paire pour le soif* left for themselves between you two. Poor devils! I think I'll go and give them the lay of the course."

"My dear Ronnie! How absurd you are. If anybody heard you they might think you were in earnest."

Hurstmanceaux looked at his sister with a shrewd, appreciative scorn in his eyes.

"They might," he said gravely. "I am usually in earnest, my dear."

"I know you are and it is a horrid thing to be," she replied with petulance. "Earnest people are always such bores." Then, remembering that she would not produce

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the effect she desired by abusing him, she changed her tone.

"Dearest Ronald, these persons are coming here to-morrow night. Let me present them to you; and if you would but say a good word for them in the world——"

He was silent.

"I think, you know," she murmured softly, "that as they bought Gerald's place they naturally rather look to us all to make things pleasant for them."

Hurstmanceaux put the white small ringed finger off his coat with a gesture which had sternness in it.

"My dear child, you are Delilah to all men born of Adam; but not to me, not to me, my child, because you are my sister. The Lord be praised for His mercies! If you had not been my sister I should have had no strength against you probably. As it is, I won't keep bad company, my dear, even to please you."

"Bad company! They are most estimable people."

"I am happy to hear so, since you let them in here."

"But everybody is going to know them."

"Then why should you care about my knowing them too?"

"That is just——" began his sister, and paused, scanning the little mouse embroidered on her handkerchief.

"Take your eyes off that bit of gossamer and look at me," said Hurstmanceaux severely. "You do this kind of thing. Cocky does it. You make Gerald do it. But I'll be damned, my dear, if you make me."

She was mute, distressed, irritated, not seeing very well what to say or resent.

"Get up a firm with old Khris," continued her brother; "Khris and Kenilworth; it will run very nicely and take the town like wildfire; I am convinced that it will; but Hurstmanceaux as 'Co.'—no thank you."

"You don't even hear me," said his sister rather piteously.

"I know all you're going to say," he replied. "You mean to float these people, and you'll do it. You'll get 'em to State concerts, and you'll get 'em to Marlborough House garden parties, and you'll get 'em to political houses, and you'll ram 'em down all our throats, and take

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the princes to dine with 'em; I know all that; it's always the same programme; and the he-beast will get a baronetcy, and the she-beast will get to Hatfield, and you'll run them just as Barnum used to run his giants and dwarfs, and you'll make a pot by it as Barnum did. Only leave me out of the thing, if you please."

"Why shouldn't you be the sleeping partner?" said his sister jestingly, but with a side glance of her lovely eyes which had a timid and keen interrogation in it. "Nobody 'd be the wiser, and your word has such weight."

"Don't make that sort of suggestion, my dear, even in joke. Gerald has helped you; I am not Gerald. You've made him dance to your tune through a lot of mud, but you won't make me. There are enough of the family in this shabby kind of business as it is."

"Oh, Ronald!——"

"You see, Sourisette," he added, "you are always telling me that I wear my clothes too long; you've often seen me in an old coat, in a shockingly old coat; but you never saw me in an ill-cut one. Well, I like my acquaintances to be like my clothes. They may be out at elbows, but I must have 'em well cut."

Lady Kenilworth gazed at her pocket-handkerchief for a few minutes in disturbed silence.

"Is that the tone you mean to take about my new people?" she asked at last.

"My dearest Sourisette, I don't take any tone. These *richards* from the Northwest are nothing to me. You are taking them up, and getting Carrie to take them up, because you mean to get lots of good things out of them. No one can possibly know 'a bull-dozing boss' from North Dakota for any other reason than to plunder him."

"Oh, Ronald! What coarse and odious things you say!"

Her exclamation was beseeching and indignant; a little flush of color went over her fair cheeks. "You shouldn't be so hard upon one," she added. "Some poet has said that poverty gives us strange bed-fellows."

"We need never lie down on the bed; we can lie in our own straw."

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"But if we have used up all our straw?"

"Then we can go out of doors and sleep *à la belle étoile*."

"And the rural constable will pass by with his lanthorn, and wake us up, and run us in! Oh, my dear Ronald, you don't know what it is to want a sovereign every moment. You're unmarried, and you shoot with a keeper's gun, and you yacht in an old wooden tub, and you lounge about all over the world with your places shut up, and your town-house let; what can you tell, what can you dream, of the straits Cocky and I are put to every single minute of our lives?"

"Because you won't pull up and lead sensible lives," said Hurstmanceaux. "You must always be in the swim, always at the most ruinously expensive places. Can't you exist without tearing over Europe and bits of Africa every year? Did our forefathers want Cairene winters? Couldn't they fish and shoot, and dance and flirt, without Norway and the Riviera? Wasn't their own county-town enough for them? Weren't their lungs capable of breathing without Biskra? Weren't they quite as good sportsmen as we are with only their fowling-pieces? Quite as fine ladies as you are, though they saw to their still-rooms?"

"Their women look very nice in the Romneys and Reynolds," said Mouse. "But you might as well ask why we don't go from Derby to Bath in a coach and six. *Autre temps autre moeurs*. There is nothing else to be said. Would you yourself use your grandfather's gun? Why should I see to my still-room?

"I do wish," she continued, "that you would talk about what you understand. I will send you the bill for the children's boots and shoes, just to show you what it costs one merely to have them properly shod."

"Poor little souls!" said Hurstmanceaux, with his smile which people called cynical. "I don't think they are the heaviest of your expenses. I believe you could live with the whole lot of them in a cottage at Broadstairs or Herne Bay all the year round for about what your hunting mares cost you in one season."

"Don't be an ass, Ronald," said his sister crossly;

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"what is the use of talking of things that nobody can do, any more than they can wear their fustian clothes or wooden shoes? You will know what I mean some day when you're married. We are worse off than the match-sellers, than the crossing-sweepers. They can do as they like, but we can't."

"Life isn't all skittles and swipes," observed Hurstmanceaux. "You always seem to think it is."

But she, disregarding him, went on in her wrath:

"It is a thousand times worse to be poor in our world than to be beggars on the high road. If they keep in with the police they're all right, but *our* police are all round us every minute of our lives, spying to see if we have a man less in the anterooms, a hoof less in the stables, if we have the same gown on, or the same houses open; if we've given up any club, any habit, any moors, any shooting; if the prince talks as much to us as usual, or the princess asks us to drive with her; if we go away for the winter to shut up a place, or make lungs an excuse for getting away to avoid Scotland; they are eternally staring, commenting, annotating, whispering over all we do; we can never get away from them; and we daren't retrench a halfpenny's worth, because if we did, the tradespeople would think we were ruined and all the pack would be down on us."

"There is some truth in that, my poor Mouse, I must allow," said her brother with a shade of unwilling sympathy in his tone. "But it's a beggarly rotten system to live your lives out on, and I think Broadstairs would be the better part, if you could only make up your mind to it. It would be only one effort instead of a series of efforts, and the cheap trippers wouldn't be worse than the Mastodons; at least you wouldn't have to do so much for them."

"Massarenes," said his sister with an impatient dive for the silver poker, and another dive with it at the fire. "The name isn't such a bad name. It might have been Healy, it might have been Murphy."

"It might have even been Biggar," replied Hurstmanceaux, amused. "Possibilities in the ways of horror are infinite when we once begin opening our doors to people

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whom nobody knows. Practically, there need be no end to it."

Mouse, leaning softly against her brother, with her hand caressing the lapel of his coat, said sweetly and insidiously:

"There is an only daughter, Ronald—an only child."

"Indeed!"

"She will be an immense heiress," sighed his sister. "Everybody will be after her."

"Everybody bar one," said her brother.

"And why bar one?"

His face darkened. "Don't talk nonsense!" he said curtly. "I don't like you when you are impertinent. It is a pity Cocky ever saw you; the Massarene alliance would have suited *him* down to the ground."

"She would have been millions of miles too good for him!" said Cocky's wife, with boundless contempt. "They don't want merely rank; they want character."

"My dear Mouse," said Hurstmanceaux, "the other day a young fellow went into a *café* in Paris, had a good soup, fish, and *roti*, *and* three cups of coffee. An unfeeling landlord arrested him as he was about to go off without paying. The people in the streets pitied him, on the whole, but they thought the three cups of coffee too much. '*Ca c'est trop fort de café*,' said a workman in a blouse to me. In a similar manner, allow me to remark that if your new friends, in addition to the smart dinner of rank, require the strong coffee of character, they are too exacting. The people in the streets won't let them have both."

Lady Kenilworth felt very angry at this impudent anecdote, and pulled to pieces some narcissus standing near her in an old china bowl.

"The analogy don't run on all fours," she said petulantly. "*My* people can pay. You have a right to anything if you only pay enough for it."

"Most things—not everything quite," said her brother indolently, as he took up his hat and cane and whistled his collie dog, who was playing with the Blenheims. "Not everything quite—yet," he repeated, as if the declaration refreshed him. "You have not the smallest

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effect upon me, and you will not present your *protégés* to me—remember that, once for all. Adieu!"

Then he touched her lightly and affectionately on her fair hair, shook himself like a dog who has been in dirty water, and left her.

Mouse, who was not a patient or resigned woman by nature, flashed a furious glance after him from the soft shade of her dark eyelashes, and her white teeth gnawed restlessly and angrily the red and lovely under-lip beneath them. He could have done so much if he would! His opinion was always listened to, and his recommendation was so rarely given that it always carried great weight. He would have told her that they were so respected precisely because he did not do such things as this which she wanted him to do.

He was a very tall and extremely handsome man, with a debonnair and careless aspect, and a distinguished way of wearing his clothes which made their frequent shabbiness look ultra *chic*. The Courcy beauty had been a thing of note for many generations, and he had as full a share of it as his sister, whom he strongly resembled. He was fourteen years older than she, and she had long been accustomed to regard him as the head of her House, for he had succeeded to the earldom when a schoolboy, and she had never known her father. He had tried his best to alter the ways of the Kenilworth establishment, but he had failed. If he talked seriously to his sister, it always ended in his paying some bill; if he talked seriously to his brother-in-law, it always ended in his being asked to settle some affair about an actress or a dispute in a pothouse. They both used him—used him incessantly; but they never attended to his counsels or his censure. They both considered that as he was unmarried, spent little, and was esteemed stingy, they really only did him a service in making him "bleed" occasionally.

"He's such a close-fisted prig," said Lord Kenilworth, and his wife always agreed to the opinion.

"Ronnie is a bore," she said, "he is always asking questions. If anybody wants to do any good they should do it with their eyes shut, and their mouths shut; a kindness is no kindness at all if it is made the occasion for an

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inquisitorial sermon. Ronnie does not often refuse one in the end, but he is always asking why and how and what, and wanting to go to the bottom of the thing, and it is never anything that concerns him. If he would just do what one wants and say nothing, it would be so much nicer, so much more delicate; I cannot endure indelicacy."

The Kenilworths, like many other wedded people, had no common bond whatever, except when they were united against somebody else; they bickered, sneered, and quarreled whenever they were by any rare chance alone, but when it was a question of attacking any third person their solidarity was admirable. Hurstmanceaux seemed to them both to have been created by nature and law to be of use to them, to carry them over troublesome places, and to lend them the ægis of his unblemished name; but of any gratitude to him neither ever dreamed; it always seemed to them that he did next to nothing for them, though if the little folks upstairs had roast mutton and sago pudding, and if the servants in Stanhope Street got their wages with any regularity, it was usually wholly due to his intervention.

He had succeeded to heavily encumbered estates, and the years of his minority, though they had done something, had not done much toward lessening the burden which lay on the title, and he had always been a poor man. But now, when he was nearing forty years of age, he could say that he was a free one.

To obtain such freedom it had required much self-denial and philosophy, and he had incurred much abuse in his family and out of it, and, as he was by nature careless and generous, the restraint upon his inclinations had been at times irksome and well-nigh unendurable. But he had adhered to the plan of retrenchment which he had cut out for himself, and it had been successful in releasing him from all obligations without selling a rood of land on any estate, or cutting any more timber than was necessary to the health of the woods themselves. He was called "the miser" commonly amongst his own people; but he did not mind the nickname; he kept his hands clean and his name high, which was more than do all his contemporaries and compeers.

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When he had left his sister this morning, and had got as far as the head of the staircase, his heart misgave him. Poor Mousie, had he been too rough on her? Did she really want money? He turned back and entered the little room again where Lady Kenilworth was sitting before the hearth, her elbow on her knee, her cheek on her hand, her blue eyes gazing absently on the fire.

He came up to her and laid his hand on her shoulder.

"My dear Sourisette! Are you troubled about money?"

"You know I always am, Ronnie," she said impatiently. "It is chronic with us; it always will be; even when the Poodle goes to glory it will be hardly any better. You know that."

The Poodle was the irreverent nickname given to the Duke of Otterbourne by his eldest son and that son's wife, on account of his fleecy-white hair and his bland ceremonious manners of the old school, at which they saw fit to laugh irreverently.

"My poor child! If you have no more solid resource than to decant Poodle's demise your prospects look blue; I always tell you so. Poodle means living and loving on into the twentieth century, never doubt that."

"I don't doubt it," said Mouse very angrily. "He will always do everything which can by any possibility most annoy us."

"But are you in any especial difficulty at this moment, Sourisette?" asked her brother in a very kind and tender tone intended to invite her confidence.

"What is especial with other people is chronic with me," she replied pettishly. "My worries and miseries are as eternal as Poodle's youth and courtships."

"But do you want money—well, more than usual?"

"I always want it," replied Mouse. "Everybody always wants it, except you."

"I know you always say that. I want it very much just now. But if it's anything for the children——"

"You are a model uncle out of a fairy book! No; it is not for the mites; they get their bread and milk and mutton chops—as yet. It is, it is—well, if you really care to know, these people are horribly rude and pressing, and

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I haven't even a hundred pounds to throw them as a sop."

She leaned back toward her writing-table which stood beside the hearth, and, tossing its litter of paper to and fro, took from the chaos a letter from a famous firm of Bond Street tradesmen, and gave it to her brother.

"As he is in the mood he may as well pay some thing," she thought. "It would be a pity not to bleed the miser when one can."

Lord Hurstmanceaux ran his eyes quickly over the letter, and a pained look passed over his face, an expression of annoyance and regret.

She was Kenilworth's wife, and had been long out of her brother's guardianship, but it hurt him to think that she exposed herself to these insults, these importunities, these humiliations.

"My dear Clare, why will you lay yourself open to be addressed in this manner?" he said gravely, and when he called her Clare she knew that he was very greatly displeased. "Why will you not pull your life together into some degree of order? Why descend to the level on which it is possible for your tradesmen to write to you in such terms as these?"

Lady Kenilworth, who was the most *caline* and coaxing of women when she chose, as she could be the most autocratic and brusque when she was with people she despised, rose, looked up in her brother's face, and stroked the lappet of his coat with her pretty slender hand sparkling with its many rings.

"Write me a little check, Ronnie," she said, "and don't put my name; make it payable to bearer."

He shook his head.

"Little checks or big checks, Mousie, don't find their way to your tradesmen. You have played me that trick more than once; I will go to these people myself and pay them the whole account; but——"

"Oh, don't pay them the whole!" said Mouse uneasily. "That would be great waste of money. If you can really spare me as much as this give it to me; I will find a thousand better uses for it than——"

"Paying a bill? I dare say. Sheridan was of your

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opinion; and when he was dying they sold his bed from under him."

"They won't sell mine, because my brother will be by my bedside," said Mouse with a sunny yet plaintive smile in her forget-me-not like eyes.

"Don't trust too much to that, my dear; I am mortal, and a good many years older than you," he answered gravely as he folded up the Bond Street tradesmen's threatening letter and put it in his coat pocket.

"You had better write a check for me, Ronald, indeed," said his sister coaxingly; "it will look odd if you pay this, or if your people pay it, and I could do a great deal with all that money."

"You would do everything except pay the account! I don't think you would do much with the riches of all the world except run through them," said Hurstmanceaux curtly, and taking no notice of the appeal. Past experience had taught him that money which passed through his sister's fingers had a knack of never reaching its destination. "I won't compromise you," he added; "don't be afraid, and I shall tell them that they have lost your custom."

"You need not say that," said Mouse uneasily: she was very fond of this particular Bond Street shop, and what was the use of paying an account if you did not avail yourself of the advantage so gained by opening another one instantly?

"I certainly shall say it," said Hurstmanceaux decidedly; and he once more left the room. Mouse looked after him with regret and uneasiness; regret that she had turned his generous impulse to such small account, and uneasiness lest he should suspect more of her affairs than it would be well for him to learn.

"He is a good fellow sometimes, but so stiff-necked and mule-headed, she thought, as she hastily calculated in her rapidly working brain how much percentage she might have got off the Bond Street account if she had dealt with the matter herself. She was extravagant, but she was very keen about money at the same time, at once prodigal and parsimonious, which is a more general combination than most people suppose.

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Hurstmanceaux looked back at her rather wistfully from between the cream-colored, rose-embroidered curtains of the doorway. It was on his lips to ask her not to pursue her patronage of Harrenden House; but as he had just promised to do her a service he could not seem to dictate to her an obedience as a return payment to him. He went away in silence.

"Besides, whatever she were to promise she would always do as she liked," he reflected: previous experiences having told him that neither threats nor persuasions ever had the slightest effect upon his sister's actions.

As he went out of the vestibule into the street, he passed a tall, very good-looking young man who was about to enter, and who nodded to him familiarly as one brother may nod to another. Hurstmanceaux said a curt good-day without a smile. The other man passed in without the preliminary of enquiring whether the lady of the house was at home, and the footman of the antechamber took off his great coat and laid his hat and cane on the table as a matter of course: a person who had known no better might have concluded that the visitor was Kenilworth himself. But to Kenny, as they called him behind his back, the anteroom lackeys were much less attentive than they were to this young man.

"My real brother-in-law," said Hurstmanceaux to himself, with a vexed frown upon his brows and a little laugh which people would have called cynical upon his lips. He did not love Kenilworth, but young Lord Brancepeth he abhorred.

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CHAPTER VI.

"I MET the Miser: how has he been to-day? Rating you, eh?" said Lord Brancepeth when he had been ten minutes or more ensconced in the cosiest corner by the boudoir fire. He was a very well-featured and well-built young man, with a dark oval face, pensive brows, and great dreamy dark brown eyes; his physiognomy, which was poetic and melancholy, did not accord with his conversation, which was slipshod and slangy, or his life which was idiotic, after the manner of his generation.

Mouse was standing behind him leaning over his shoulder to look at an ancient British coin newly attached to his watch-chain; her own eyes were soft with a fullness of admiration which would have been doubtless delightful to him if he had not been so terribly used to it.

"The Miser was out of humor as usual," she replied; "Ronald should really live amongst some primitive sect of Shakers or Quakers, or Ranters or Roarers, whatever they are called: he has all the early Christian virtues, and he thinks nobody should live upon credit."

"He certainly shouldn t live amongst us," said Brancepeth, with a self-satisfied laugh, as if chronic debt were a source of especial felicitation. "How he hates me, by the way, Mousie."

"You are not a primitive virtue," said his friend, with her hands lying lightly on his shoulders, and her breath stirring like a soft balmy south wind amongst his close curling dark hair.

Brancepeth had ceased to be a worshipper: and he had ceased even to like being the worshipped, but habit is second nature, and it was his habit to be wherever Lady Kenilworth was, and that kind of habit becomes second nature to lazy and good-hearted men.

He was a young man who was so constantly, almost universally, adored that it bored him, and he often reflected that he should never be lastingly attached except

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to a woman who should detest him. He had not found that woman at the date at which he was allowing his friend Mouse to hang over his shoulder and admire the ancient British coin. He always told people that he was very fond of Cocky. Cocky and he were constantly to be seen walking together, or driving together, or playing games together, outdoors and indoors; they were even sometimes seen together in the nursery of those charming little blonde-haired, black-eyed children who were taught by their nurses to pray for Cocky as papa.

"The Miser will marry some day," said Brancepeth now, "and then he won't be so easy to bleed."

"I am sure he will never marry. Alan is sure he never will." Alan was her second brother.

"Stuff!" said Brancepeth. "Alan will be out in his calculations."

"You will marry some day, too, I am sure, Harry," whispered Mouse, as she leaned over his chair; her tone was the tone of a woman who says what she does not think to enjoy the pleasure of being told that what she says is absurd and impossible.

Brancepeth gave a little laugh, and kissed the hand which was resting on the back of his chair.

"When Cocky goes to glory," he answered.

"Cocky!" said Cocky's wife with fierce contempt. "*He* will never die. Men like him never do die. They drink like ducks and never show it. They eat like pigs and never feel it. They cut their own throats every hour and are all the better for it. They destroy their livers, their lungs, their stomachs and their brains, and live on just as if they had all four in perfection. Nothing ever hurts them though their blood is brandy, their flesh is absinthe, and their minds are a sink emptied into a bladder. They look like cripples and like corpses; but they never die. The hard-working railway men die, the hard-working curates die, the pretty little children die, the men who do good all day long and have thousands weeping for them, they die; but men like Cocky live and like to live, and if by any chance they ever fall ill, they get well just because everybody is passionately wishing them dead!"

She spoke with unusual intensity of expression, her

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transparent nostrils dilated, her red lips curled, her turquoise eyes gleamed and glittered; Brancepeth looked at her in alarm.

"On my word, Sourisette," he murmured, "when you look like that you frighten a fellow. I wouldn't be in Cocky's shoes, not for a kingdom."

"I thought you were longing to replace Cocky?"

"Well, yes, of course, yes," said Brancepeth. "Only you positively alarm me when you talk like this. I'm not such an over-and-above correct-living fellow myself, and Cocky isn't so out-and-out bad as all that, you know. After all, he's got some excuse."

"Some excuse!" she repeated, her delicate complexion flushing red. "Some excuse! You—you, Harry—you dare to say that to me?"

"Well, it's the truth," murmured Brancepeth sulkily. "And don't make me a scene, Mouse; my nerves can't stand it; I'm taking cocaine and I ought to keep quiet, I ought indeed."

"Why do you take cocaine?" asked Lady Kenilworth, changing to inquietude and interrogating his countenance anxiously.

"All sorts of reasons," said her friend, sulkily still. "Oh, yes, I look well enough, I dare say; people often look well when they are half dead. Don't make me scenes, Topinetta; I can't bear them."

"I never make *you* scenes, darling; not even when you give me reason!"

"Humph!" said Brancepeth, very doubtfully, "when do I give you reason? There never was anybody who stood your bullying as I stand it."

"Bullying! Oh, Harry!"

"Yes, bullying. Cocky don't stand it; he licks you; I cave in."

With those unpoetic words Lord Brancepeth laid his poetic head back on the cushions of his chair, and closed his eyelids till their long thick lashes rested on his cheeks, with an air of martyrdom and exhaustion. She looked at him anxiously.

"You really do not look well, love," she whispered, as she hung over his chair. "It is—is it—that you care for

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any other woman? I would rather know the truth, Harry."

"Women be hanged," said Brancepeth with a sigh, his eyes still closed. "It's the cocaine; cures a fellow, you know, but kills him. That's what all the new medicines do."

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CHAPTER VII.

"By the way," said the young man, still with his eyes closed, and indisposed to follow his companion's lead into the domain of sentiment, "I saw the most beautiful woman last night that I ever saw in my life—the most glorious creature! Such eyes! you can't imagine such eyes!"

"What color?" asked Mouse, with a glance at her own eyes in an adjacent mirror and a displeased severity on her mouth.

"Black—black as night! At least, you know, perhaps they weren't really black; they were like that stone—what do you call it—opal? No; onyx—yes, onyx. Such a woman! I'm a bad 'un to please, but, on my honor ——"

"You are very enthusiastic!" said Mouse, with the lines of her lips more scornful and displeased. "Where did you see this miracle?"

Brancepeth smiled.

"Lord, how soon they are jealous!" he thought. "Take fire like tow!"

Aloud he answered:

"Yesterday my sister got me to go to complines at the Oratory. It was some swell saint or another, and some of the cracks were singing there. This woman was close to where I was. She was all in black, and seemed very much 'gone' on the service; her eyes got full of tears at part of it. Well, I don't mind telling you she fetched me so that I asked the Duc d'Arcy to see my sister safe home, and I followed the lady with the eyes. She got into a little dark *coupé*, and my hansom bowled after it. I ran her to earth at a private hotel—quite solemn sort of place called Brown's—and there they told she was the Countess zu Lynar."

"Countess zu Lynar! then one can soon see who she is," said Mouse, as she went and got an Almanac de Gotha of the year from her writing-table.

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"Oh, I looked there last night," said Brancepeth; "she isn't there; but the porter told me she used to be the wife of that awfully rich banker Vanderlin."

Mouse looked up, astonished and momentarily interested.

"Are you quite sure?"

"Positive."

"Then she can't be young now," said Lady Kenilworth, with relief and satisfaction.

"Oh, yes, she is; at least, quite young enough," said Brancepeth vaguely.

"Oh, I know all about her!" continued his friend. "She is not in society. We stand a good deal in London, but at present we don't receive divorced women."

Brancepeth laughed softly with vast amusement, and did not offer any explanation of his laughter.

"Such eyes!" he murmured dreamily. His friend was silent. After a while—"Oh, Lord, such eyes!"

"My dear Harry," said Mouse, with cold dignity, "pray spare me your lyrics, and go and write them in the porter's book at the private hotel. You could probably approach the lady without the formula of introduction; a bouquet would do it for you."

Brancepeth shook his head mournfully.

"Not that sort," he said gloomily. "And you needn't be in such a wax about it, Mouse; she's gone back to the Continent this morning. They told me so at the hotel just now."

"And you did not go to Dover instead of coming here?" said his friend sarcastically. "I am amazed that old acquaintance had such a hold remaining on you as to make you resist the seductions of the tidal train."

"You can be nasty about it if you like," said the handsome youth with sullen resignation. "You make the mistake which all women make. You fly at a man when he tells you the truth; and then you are astonished another time that he tells you a lie. If there'd been anything in it, of course I shouldn't have told you anything."

"An admirable confession. I shall remember it another time."

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"Women always make fellows lie. You bite our noses off if we ever happen to tell a word of truth!"

"But it breaks my heart to think that you even see that other women exist, Harry!"

"Oh, bother!" said Brancepeth roughly. "Don't be a fool, Mousie. You see other men exist fast enough yourself."

She was silent. She was conscious that she did do so. Happily for the preservation of peace, there was at that moment announced Prince Khristof of Karstein.

"Her father," murmured Mousie in a swift whisper, but Brancepeth was too obtuse to understand; he only stared, conscious that he had missed a tip.

Prince Khristof was a bland, gracious person who had been very fair in youth and early manhood, and still preserved a delicate clear complexion and eyes as blue and serene as Clare Kenilworth's; his hair was white and silken, his form slender and stately, his carriage elegant; and, alas! there was not a good club in all the world into which he could take his charming presence. When the century was young he had been born the seventh son of a then reigning duke in a small principality of green pasture and glacier-fed stream, and pretty towns like magnified toys, and many square leagues of resinous scented pine forest. The century had seen the principality absorbed, the dukedom mediatized, the towns ruined, and the pine woods leased to Javish banks. As in many other cases the gain of the empire had been the ruin of the province. Prince Khristof's eldest brother still abode in his toy-city, and hats were lifted as he passed, but he reigned no more; and Prince Khristof himself, who had been a Colonel of Cuirassiers in his cradle, and at ten years old had seen a sentinel flogged for omitting to carry arms when he had passed, was glad to furnish a mansion for Mr. Massarene, and take forty per cent. from the decorators and dealers, who under his patronage furnished the admirable Clodion and the other rarities, beauties, and luxuries, to the adornment of Harrenden House.

He felt it hard that when he had permitted his daughter to marry into finance the misalliance had so little profited himself that he was driven to such expedients. But so it

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was; and though the descent had been gradual, it had been one which ended in Avernus, and royal and patrician society had shut all its great gates upon him, leaving him only its side entrances and back staircases. The man who could remember when he had been a child in his nurse's arms, seeing guards carry arms to salute him as he was borne past them suffered acutely from his degradation: but he was beyond all things a philosopher, and thought that fine tobaccos and delicate wines soothe, if they do not cure, many wounds, even when you can only enjoy such things at the expense of your inferiors.

"This old beggar ought to know," thought Brancepeth, occupied with his new idea and to whom Germans meant every nationality from Schleswig-Holstein to Moldavia; and he addressed the newcomer point-blank.

"Do you know a Countess Lynar, sir?"

"I know a great many Lynars," replied the Prince. "It is a very general name. Can you add anything more definite?"

"She's the woman whom that Jew fellow, Vanderlin, divorced," replied Brancepeth.

The Prince smiled and coughed.

"Olga zu Lynar? I know her—yes. She is my only daughter. Vanderlin is a banker, but he is not a Jew."

Brancepeth grew very red.

"I—I—beg you ten thousand pardons," he muttered. "I didn't know, you know; I am always blundering."

"There is nothing to pardon," said Prince Chris sweetly. "Englishmen are so insular. They never know anything about their neighbors across the water. It is perfectly well known everywhere out of England that my daughter was—separated—from Vanderlin, but that you, my Lord Brancepeth, should not know it is *tout ce qu'il y a de plus naturel.*"

"He takes it uncommonly coolly," thought Brancepeth, still under the spell of his astonishment, and still distressed as an Englishman always is at having made a stupid mistake and wounded an acquaintance.

"But is she married again?" he asked anxiously. "How does she come to be Lynar?"

"Dear youth, you are not discreet," thought the

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Prince, as he replied frankly that her mother had been a Countess Lynar, and that his daughter had taken her mother's name, he was himself never very sure why; but she was always a little self-willed and fanciful, she was a woman; *femme très femme!* When she had married into *la haute finance* she had of course forfeited her place in the Hof-Kalendar.

"But her maiden name is there." He turned over the leaves of the Almanac de Gotha and pointed to the entry of the birth of his daughter the Countess Olga Marie Valeria.

"Why does she call herself Countess Lynar?" said Brancepeth with curiosity, conscious of his own bad manners. Prince Khris pointed to the page:

"It was her mother's name, you see; and more than that, in the property which my daughter possesses there is a little Schloss Lynar, hardly more than a ruin, hidden under woods in Swabia which gives that title to whoever owns it. Were you to purchase it you would have the right to write yourself Graf zu Lynar."

"I would rather own the lady than the castle," said Brancepeth, too stupid and too careless to note the deepening offence in the eyes of Mouse.

Prince Khris smiled meaningly.

"The lady might give you the more trouble of the two."

"How he hates her!" thought Brancepeth. "I suppose she keeps a tight rein on the property."

Brancepeth's experiences, which had been extensive in range though brief in years, had told him that these family dislikes and disagreements usually had their root in the *auri sacra fames;* and the fact was well known all over Europe that this serene, courtly, distinguished-looking gentleman, whose name was recorded in the Hof-Kalendar, lived very nearly, if not entirely, by his wits.

High play is one thing; cheating is another; if you ruin yourself it is your own affair, but if you try to ruin others by unfair means it is the affair of your neighbors. Prince Khristof's mind was so made that he had never been able to perceive or comprehend the difference; of late years the meaning of that difference had been enforced on him disagreeably.

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"I suspect he is the devil and all to have anything to do with at close quarters," reflected Brancepeth, who was a very cautious young man. "And what a mess he's made of his life, good Lord, with all his cleverness and position; why, a decent croupier's a ten thousand times better fellow; he'll rook you like winking if he can get you down at *écarté*."

"And she came over here to see you, I suppose," inquired Brancepeth, still curious.

"Scarcely," said the Prince with a fleeting smile.

"Would you—wouldn't you give me a word of introduction?" said Brancepeth hurriedly and conscious of his own temerity.

"To my daughter?" said the Prince blandly. "My dear lord, I should of course be delighted to do so—delighted; but I am not on speaking terms with her. I don't call on her myself. How can I send anybody else to call?"

"What did you quarrel about?" asked Harry bluntly. "Who was right?"

Prince Khris looked at him with amusement; it was so droll to find people who asked questions like children instead of finding out things quietly for themselves. To his finer and more philosophic intelligence such a primitive question as right could not seriously affect anything. He thought the young Englishman a fool, an impertinent and dense fool; but he was never impatient of fools, they were too useful to him in the long run. What wise man would be able to play *écarté* unless there were fools with whom to play it?

"Of course the divorce was all Vanderlin's fault!" said Brancepeth with clumsy curiosity.

"It is always the man's fault in such cases. That is well known."

Prince Khris smiled as he spoke; there was something sardonic and suggestive about the smile which made it almost a grin, and which seemed singularly ugly to Brancepeth considering that the person concerned was the grinner's only daughter. No one could more completely or more cruelly have expressed the speaker's conviction that Vanderlin was entirely blameless in this matter.

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Mouse listened in extreme irritation; it seemed to be beyond even her Harry's usual obtuseness to continue the theme of a woman's indiscretions to that woman's own father. Besides, she hated women who were divorced: they made it so difficult and unpleasant for the wiser members of their sex.

"My daughter seems to have impressed you, Lord Brancepeth," continued the Prince. "Where is it that you have seen her?"

"At the Oratory," said Brancepeth, "and in the street. She is so awfully fetching, you know."

"She is a woman who makes people look at her," replied Prince Khristof indifferently. "Did you hear her sing at the Oratory? She has a voice! ah, such a voice! the most flexible mezzo-soprano. She could have made her fortune on the stage."

"No. She didn't sing," said Brancepeth, greatly interested. "She seemed to pray no end, and she cried. But she cried so beautifully. Not as most of them do who make such figures of themselves. But the tears just brimming in her eyes and falling, like the what d'ye call 'em, you know, the Magdalens in the picture galleries."

The Prince laughed outright.

"For felicitous allusion your Englishman has never an equal," he thought, whilst he said aloud: "My dear lord, what did I tell you? Olga is *femme, très femme*. If I wanted to weep I should not go to the Oratory myself. But a woman does go. It is a consolation to her to be admired and pitied, and I have no doubt she observed that you did both."

"She didn't even see me," said the younger man, on whose not oversensitive nerves something in the elder's tone grated.

"Her father don't do much to save her character," he thought. "It's an ill bird fouls its own nest."

Meanwhile Mouse had listened with scarcely concealed impatience to all these questions and answers. She sat apparently engrossed in the pages of the Almanac de Gotha, but in reality losing nothing of her friend's interrogations and implications. At last, out of patience, she

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closed the little red book and said imperiously to Brancepeth:

"Surely it is time you went on guard? Have you any idea what time it is? Besides, if you don't mind my saying so, I want to talk about something to the Prince before I go for my drive."

"I aren't on guard to-day; but I'll go, of course, if you want me to go," murmured Brancepeth sulkily, raising his lazy long limbs out of his comfortable resting-place with a sense of regret, for he would willingly have gone on talking about the lady of the Oratory for another hour.

"Such a dear good boy, but always wanting in tact," said Lady Kenilworth, as the door of the morning-room closed on him.

"Wanting in reason too. To talk of another woman when he is in the presence of Lady Kenilworth! What obtuseness! what blindness," said Prince Khris with graceful gallantry. "But Englishmen are always like that. They go all round the world and see nothing but their own umbrellas; they keep on their hats in St. Peter's, and set up their kodaks at the Taj Mahal. I have always said that a people who could conquer India and yet clothe their Viceroy in a red cloth tunic, are a people without perception. They travel, but they remain islanders. Their minds are enfolded in their bath-towels and sanitary flannels. They do not see beyond the rim of their tubs. But I believe you did me the honor to wish to speak to me? I need not say that if there be the smallest thing in which I can be of service you command my devotion."

Mouse sat dreamily and irritably opening and shutting the Almanac de Gotha. Prince Khristof wore a wholly altered aspect to her now that she saw him as the father of a woman whom Harry admired and had followed.

"Do you know—such is my insularity—that I never knew you had a daughter or had had a wife?" she said abruptly, as she pushed the book away.

"Dear Madame! you surely have not sent for me to speak of these two ladies?" he said, picking up the little red book. "My deceased wife's name is here, if you chose to look for it; my daughter's is not, because she ex-

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iled herself into the *haute finance*. I once had the entire collection of this Almanac since its beginning in 1760. If we want to see how despicably modern editions fall below the standard of all work of the last century, nothing will show us that fact more completely and conclusively than this Almanac. Contrast the commonplace portraits of to-day's Gotha with the exquisite designs of the eighteenth century kalendars."

"Yes," said Mouse shortly: "yes, no doubt. You are always right in matters of art. My dear Prince, how very admirably you have housed those people at Harrenden House. If only the birds were worthy the nest."

"Ah-ha! It was for this, was it, that you wanted to see me?" he thought, as he said aloud: "I suggested—I merely suggested. I am delighted the result meets your approval. They are excellent people, those good Massarenes. You remember that I told you so in Paris. *Des bons gens; de très bons gens.* A little uncouth, but the world likes what is simple and fresh."

She looked at him to see if he could really say all this with a serious countenance; she saw that he could; his handsome fair features were without the ghost of a smile and his whole expression was grave, sincere, attuned to admiring candor.

"If he takes it like that I had best take it so too," thought Mouse, who was aware that she was but a mere beginner and baby beside him in the delicate arts of dissimulation. But Nature had made her proud, inclined to be blunt and sarcastic, and occasionally unwisely inclined to frankness; she looked him straight in the eyes now, and said:

"But you and I are going to do our duty to our fellow Christians, and polish them, aren't we? I was quite straight with you about the purchase of Vale Royal; but you weren't so straight with me about Harrenden House. Don't you think, Prince, we can do our friends more good if we are friends ourselves? Quarreling is always a mistake."

He bowed and smiled. His smooth delicate features expressed neither annoyance nor pleasure, neither wonder nor surprise.

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"I am always Lady Kenilworth's devoted servant," he said graciously, with the air of a suzerain accepting homage. "I am sorry you think that I should have consulted you about the town-house," he added. "It did not occur to me; you were in Egypt. I never offend or forget those who wish me well—of that you may be sure. It was amusing to arrange that house, and one could be of so much use to artists and other deserving people of talent."

Mouse laughed, rather rudely, and her laughter brought a slight angry flush to the cheek of Prince Khris. He had both noble and royal blood in his veins, and at the sound of that derisive little laugh he could have strangled her with pleasure. By an odd contradiction, Lady Kenilworth offended him by precisely that same kind of bluntness and nakedness of speech with which her brother had offended herself. The delicate euphemisms which she expected to have used to please herself seemed to her altogether ridiculous when they were required by another person.

"Englishwomen are always so coarse," he thought; "they never understand veiled phrases. They will call their spade a spade. There is no need to do so, whether you are digging a grave with it or digging for gold; it can always be a drawing-room fire-shovel for other people, whatever work it may accomplish.

"Yes, you are quite right, dear lady," he added, after a slight pause. "The task is not a light one; we will divide its difficulties. I have experience that you have not yet gained; you have influence that I have—alas!—lost. Let us take counsel together. Our friends the Massarenes are good people—excellent people; it is a pleasure to guide them in the way they should go."

He remained with her half an hour, and only left her when it was announced that her carriage was waiting below. He kissed her hand with all the reverential grace which a fine gentleman can lend to his farewell; but as he descended the staircase and went into the street, he swore under his breath.

"There is no devil like a blonde devil!" he thought. "Mouse they call her! A rat! a rat! with teeth as sharp as nails and claws which can cling like a flying bat's! It

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is little use for the world to have made woman all these thousands of years; she remains just what she was in Eve's time, in Eriphyle's time—always the same—always purchasable, always venal, always avaricious! Ah! why was this rodent not my daughter? We would have made the world our oyster, and no one should have known the taste of an oyster but ourselves!"

Whilst he passed along Stanhope Street into the Park his own daughter was standing in a room of a secluded and aristocratic hotel in the Faubourg St. Germain, where she had arrived that morning.

She was dressed in black, with three strings of pearls round her throat; they were the pearls she had worn on her ill-fated marriage day. She was a woman of singular beauty; the kind of beauty which resists sorrow and time, and ennobles even the mask of death.

With her was one of her cousins, Ernst von Karstein, the only one of her family who had been faithful to her through good and evil report, who had loved her always, before her marriage and after it; but who had always known that he could look for no response from her.

"You are always well, Olga," he was saying now. "What amulet have you?"

"I imagine," she answered, "that my talisman consists in absolute indifference as to whether I be ill or well."

"That is a blasphemy," said her companion. "No one can be indifferent to health. Ill-health intensifies every other evil and saps the roots of every enjoyment."

"Yet to lie on a sick bed, at peace with man and God, and surrounded by those we love, would that be so sad a fate?"

"You speak of what you know nothing about; you are never ill! You grow morbid, Olga. You live like a nun. You see no one. The finest mind cannot resist the morbid influences of constant solitude. Whoever your Pope is, you should ask his dispensation from such vows."

"The law has been my Pope, and has set me free of all vows. I live thus because I do not care to live otherwise."

"I should have thought you too proud a woman to accept excommunication in this submissive way."

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She smiled a little.

"Proud? I? The daughter of Khristof of Karstein, and the divorced wife of Adrian Vanderlin?"

"Curse them both!" said her cousin under his breath.

"You have been in London?" he said aloud.

"A week, yes: my father's affairs, as usual."

"You never see him?"

"Never. See the man who ruined my life!"

"But you have no proof of that?"

She smiled again very sadly.

"A crime which can be proved is half undone. He was too wary to be traced in all these schemes of infamy."

"Yet you befriend him?"

"Befriend? That is not the word. I spend my mother's money on him for her sake. One saves him at least from public disgrace. But he games away all he gets, and continues to live in the way you know."

"I do not think you should waste your substance on him. Keep it for yourself, and return to the world."

"On sufferance, as a *declasée?* Never!"

"As my wife. I have said so many times. I never change, Olga."

She held out her hand to him with a noble and grateful gesture.

"You are always faithful. You alone. I thank you. But you must leave me to my fate, dear Ernst. It is not in your power to change it."

"It would be in my power if you gave me the mandate."

"But it is that which I cannot do; which I shall never do."

"Because you still love the man who repudiated and disgraced you!"

She shrank a little as at a blow.

"One cannot love and unlove at will," she said simply. "It is very generous of you to be ready to give the shield of your umblemished honor to a dishonored woman. But were I ungenerous, unworthy enough, to accept such a sacrifice I should but make you and make myself more unhappy than we now are. All the feeling which is still alive in me lives only for the memory of the past."

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Her cousin turned away and paced the room to hide the pain he felt. He had loved her through good and evil report, had remained unmarried for her sake, and was ready now to accept all obloquy, censure and discredit for her sake.

"Go, my dear Ernst," she said very gently; "go, and forget me. You might as well love a buried corpse as love a woman with such a fate as mine."

"My love should have power to magnetize the corpse into fresh life!"

She shook her head.

"It would be impossible. Were it possible, what use would be a galvanized corpse? An unnatural unreal thing which would drop back into the dust of death."

He did not reply; he endeavored to control his emotion.

"My dear Olga," he said, when he could do so, "allow me to say one thing to you without causing you offence. Unknown to yourself, I think you cherish an illusion which can only cause you unhappiness. You think and speak as if your division from Adrian Vanderlin were but some quarrel, some mistake, which explanation, mediation, or time could clear away. You forget that you are entire strangers to each other; worse than strangers, because there is an irrevocable chasm between you."

She did not reply; an expression of intense suffering came into her eyes, but she restrained any outward utterance of it.

"It hurts me to say these harsh things to you," he continued. "I would so much sooner encourage you in your sentiment. But to what end should I do so? You are a woman of deep and passionate feeling. You do not forget; you do not change; your little boy's grave is to you what Bethlehem was to the Early Christians; Vanderlin is to you what Ulysses was to Penelope. You never seem to realize that this past to which you cling is a wholly dead thing, no more to be imbued again with the breath of life than the body of your poor child, or the marble which lies over him. It is intolerable that a woman as young, as lovely, as rich, as admired and as admirable as you are should pass your years in obscurity fettered to a pack of useless memories like a living person, to a corpse.

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I have told you so often; I shall never cease to tell you so. What do you expect? What do you hope? What do you desire?"

"Nothing." The word was cold, incisive, harsh; he tortured her but she did not give any sign of pain except by the nervous gesture with which her fingers closed on the strings of pearls at her throat as if they were a *collier de force* which compressed and suffocated her.

"No one lives without desires or ends of some kind however absurd or unattainable they may be," he said with truth. "I think you deceive yourself. I think that, without your being sensible of it, you brood so much over the past because you fancy vaguely that you will evolve some kind of future out of it, as necromancers used to stare into a crystal until they saw the future suggested on its surface. The crystal gave them nothing but what their own imagination supplied. So it is with you. Your imagination makes you see in Vanderlin a man who does not exist and never existed; and it also makes you fancy possible some kind of reconciliation or friendship which is as totally impossible as if you and he were both in your coffins."

She had turned from the window and walked to and fro the room, unwilling that he should see the emotion which his blunt speech awakened in her. There was a certain truth in them which she could not wholly deny and of which she was ashamed.

"Do not let us speak of these things. It is useless," she said with impatience. "You do not understand; you are a man; how can you comprehend all that there is ineffaceable, unforgetable, for a woman in four years of the tenderest and closest union? Nothing can destroy it for her. For a man it is a mere episode more or less agreeable, more or less tenacious in its hold on him; but to her ——."

She stopped abruptly: her companion looked at her with admiration and compassion mingled in equal parts, and he smiled slightly.

"My dear Olga! Once in a hundred years a woman is born who takes such a view as you do of love and life. They are dear to poets, and furnish the themes of the

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most moving dramas. But they are women who invariably end miserably, either in a cloister like Heloise, or in a tomb like Juliet, or simply and more prosaically with tubercles on their lungs at Hyères or the Canaries. You know the world, or you used to know it. You must be aware that there are millions of women who in your place would have consoled themselves long ago. I want you to see the unwisdom and the uselessness of such self-sacrifice. I want you to resume your place in the world. I want you to realize that life is like the earth: there is the winter, more or less long, no doubt, but afterward there is the spring. You know that poem of Sully Prudhomme, in which he imagines that all the plants agree to refrain from bearing flowers a whole year. But that year has never been seen in fact. The poem is wrong artistically and scientifically."

"Of the earth, yes; but in the human soul there are many spots stricken with barrenness for ever."

"But not at your age?"

"What has age to do with it?"

He sighed; he felt the use of argument, the futility of entreaty.

"Are you not too proud a woman," he said at length, "to sit in the dust, with ashes on your head, smitten to the ground by an unjust sentence?"

"I have told you. All my pride is dead; not for a year like Sully Prudhomme's flowers, but for ever."

"And you forgive the man who killed it?"

The blood mantled in her face.

"That is a question I cannot allow, even to you, dear Ernst."

He was silenced.

"And you are going back to the owls and the bitterns of Schloss Lynar?" he asked, as he took his leave of her half an hour later. "What a life for you, that Swabian solitude!"

"The bitterns and owls are very good company, and at least they never offend me."

"Let me be as fortunate!" he said with a sigh. "I may return to-morrow."

"Yes, I do not leave until evening!"

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When he had left her she remained lost in the sadness of her own useless thoughts for some moments; then she put on a long black cloak, a veil which hid her features, and went out in the street, saying nothing to the two servants who traveled with her or to the servant of the hotel. She went out into the street and crossed the Seine by the bridge of Henri Quatre, her elegance of form and her height making some of the passers-by pause and stare, wondering who she could be, alone, on foot, and so closely veiled. One man followed and accosted her, but he did not dare persevere.

She went straight on her way to the Rue de Rivoli, for she had known Paris well, and loved it as we love a place which has been the seat of our happiness. It was near the end of a grey and chilly day; the lights were glittering everywhere, and the animation of a great and popular thoroughfare was at its height. The noise of traffic and the haste of crowds made her ears ache with sound, so used as she now was to the absolute silence of her Swabian solitude; a silence only broken by the rush of wind or water. She approached a very large and stately building which looked like a palace blent with a prison; it was the French house of business of the great Paris and Berlin financiers, Vanderlin et Cie.

She walked toward it and past it, very slowly, whilst its electric lamps shed their rays upon her.

She passed it and turned, and passed it and turned again, and as often as she could do so without attracting attention from the throngs or from the police. There was a mingling of daylight and lamplight; above head cumuli clouds were driven before a north wind. She waited on a mere chance; the chance of seeing one whom she had not seen for eight years pass out of a small private door to his carriage. She knew his hours, his habits; probably, she thought, they had not changed.

She was rewarded, if it could be called reward.

As she passed the façade for the eighth time, and those on guard before the building began to watch her suspiciously, she saw a tall man come out of that private doorway and cross the pavement to a *coupé* waiting by the curbstone. In a moment he had entered it; the door had

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closed on him, the horses had started down the Rue de Rivoli.

She had seen the man who had repudiated and dishonored her; the only man she had ever loved; the father of her dead boy.

"Does he ever remember?" she wondered as she turned away, and was lost amongst the crowds in the falling night.

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CHAPTER VIII.

"If you get into a bad set, I tell you frankly I shall never help you out of it. A bad set is a bog; a hopeless bog; you flounder on in it till you sink. Can't you understand? If you are going to be taken up by this kind of people, don't ask me to do any more for you. That's all. I don't want to be unkind, but it must be one thing or another. I cannot come here if I am likely to meet persons whom I won't know. Anybody would say the same."

She spoke with severity, as to a chidden child, as she lighted a cigarette and put it between her roseleaf lips. She was in the boudoir of Harrenden House, and Margaret Massarene listened in humble and dejected silence to the rebuke. The bone of contention was represented by two visiting cards, on which were printed respectively Lady Mary Altringham and Lady Linlithgow: the bearers of those names had just been turned away from the gate below by order of the fair consor, and the mistress of Harrenden House, being a primitive person, to whom a want of hospitality appeared a crime, was swallowing her tears under difficulty.

"But surely these ladies are high and all that, ma'am?" she pleaded piteously in her ignorance.

"They were born if you mean that," replied Mouse with great impatience. "Lady Mary was a Fitz-Frederick and the Linlithgow was a Knotts-Buller. But they are nowhere. They have put themselves out of court. No one worth thinking of knows them. They can do you no good, and they can do you a great deal of harm."

Mrs. Massarene puckered up in her fingers the fine cambric of her handkerchief.

"But I know Lady Mary, ma'am!"

"Drop her, then."

"What have she done, ma'am?"

"Oh, lots of things; gone wrong stupidly, turned the

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county against her; her boy's tutor, and a young artist who went down to paint the ballroom, and all that kind of silly public sort of thing; people don't speak to her even in the hunting-field. She can't show herself at Court. The girls were presented by their grandmother. She is completely *tarée*—completely!"

The portrait was somewhat heavily loaded with colors, but she knew that her hearer would not be impressed by semi-tones or monochrome, and she really could not have Lady Mary coming and going at Harrenden House.

"As for the other woman," she added, "there is nothing actually against her, but she is bad form. They are as poor as Job and riddled with debts; they have even been glad to let their eldest daughter marry the banker of their own county borough!"

To her humble companion, to whom not so very long before a banker's clerk had seemed a functionary to be addressed as Sir, and viewed with deep respect, this social error did not carry a deep dye of iniquity. But she abandoned Lady Linlithgow; for the other culprit she ventured to plead.

"Lady Mary was so very kind to my child," she murmured timidly. "When Kathleen was at school, before we came over, Lady Mary's own daughters——"

"What has that to do with it? I tell you her daughters go out with their grandmother. You know nothing of all these things. You must do as you are told. You remember your blunder about my aunt Courcy?"

This reminiscence was a whip of nettles which always lay ready to her monitress's hand, and the monitress used it with great effect. But such a blunder still seemed natural to her; Mrs. Cecil Courcy was a commoner, and these ladies who had just been turned from her gates were titled people. Why was the one at the apex of fashion, and the others "nowhere," as her monitress expressed it.

She hinted timidly at this singular discrepancy, so unintelligible to the socially untutored mind.

"How is it possible to make you understand?" said Mouse, lighting a second cigarette before the first was half consumed, after the wasteful manner of female smokers. "Rank by itself is nothing at all; at least,

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well, yes, of course, it is something; but when people have got on the wrong side of the post, they are of no use socially to anybody. It isn't what you do; it is how you do it. You know there is an old adage: 'Some mustn't look in at a church door, and others may steal all the church plate.' It is always so in this world. Lady Mary's muffed her life, as the boys say. I daresay there are worse women; but there isn't one so stupid in all the three kingdoms. Who goes driving all alone with a tutor? Who makes a pet of a little two-sous Belgian fresco painter? Who gets herself talked about with the attorney of her own town? Nobody who has a grain of sense. These are things which put a woman out of society at once and forever. I must beg you to try and understand one most essential fact. There are people extremely well-born who are shady, and there are others come from heaven knows where who are *chic*. It is due to tact more than anything else. Tact is, after all, the master of the ceremonies of life. It isn't Burke or Debrett who can tell you who to know, and who to avoid. There is no Court Circular published which can show you where the ice won't bear you, and where it will, whom you may only know out of England and whom you may safely know in it. There are no hard and fast rules about the thing. If you haven't been born to that kind of knowledge you must grope about till you pick it up. I am very much afraid you will never pick it up. You will never know a princess without her gilt coach-and-six; you will never recognize an empress in a waterproof and goloshes; and you will never grasp the fact that supreme, inexorable, and omnipotent Fashion may be a little pale shabby creature like my aunt Courcy, who pinches and screws about a groschen, but who can make or mar people in society just as she pleases."

Margaret Massarene winced. She had seen Mrs. Cecil Courcy that very day in the park driving with the Queen of Denmark, who was on a visit to Marlborough House. All these niceties of shade confused her utterly. "Society's just like Aspinall's Enamels," she thought in her bewilderment; and if you wanted a plain yellow, you were confused by a score of gradations varying from

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palest lemon to deepest orange: there were no plain yellows any more.

"But I've always been told that if one's pile's big, real big, one can always go anywhere?" she ventured to say, unconscious of the cynical character of her remark.

"You can go to Court *here*, if that's your ideal. You do go," replied her teacher with a slighting accent of contempt which sounded like high treason to the mind of the Ulster loyalist; "but it don't follow you can get in elsewhere. It just depends on lots of chances. Some people never get into the world at all; merely because they don't spend their money cleverly at the onset."

"Perhaps they spare at the spigot and pour out at the bung-hole, my lady," said Mrs. Massarene in homely metaphor. "There's a many has that fault, I have it myself. It's all I can do still to hold myself from saving the candle-ends."

"Good heavens! Do you really mean it?"

"I do, indeed, ma'am," said the mistress of Harrenden House. "When I see them beautiful wax-lights, just burned an inch or two, and going to be taken away by them wasteful servants——"

Her companion laughed, infinitely diverted.

"But it's all electric light here!"

"Not in the bedrooms. I wouldn't have the uncanny thing in the bedrooms. You see, my lady," she added timidly in confidential whispers, "William should have led me up to all this grandeur gradual. But he didn't. He always said, 'We'll scrape on this side and dash on the other.' So till we come over to be gentlefolks, I had to cook and sweep, and pinch and spare, and toil and moil, and I can't get out of the habit. On the child he always spent; but on naught else not a cent till we came to Europe."

"Ah, by the way, this daughter," said Mouse, suddenly roused to the perception that there was an unknown factor in the lives of these humble people. "Where is she? I have never seen her. She is out, I think?"

Over the pallid, puffy, sorrowful face of the poor harassed aspirant to smart society there came a momentary brightness.

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"Yes, ma'am; she's what you call 'out'; I presented her myself," said Mrs. Massarene with pride.

"But where is she now?"

"Kathleen—Katherine—is in India, my lady."

"Good gracious! Why?"

"Well, she's great friends with the Marquis of Framlingham's daughters," said Mrs. Massarene, feeling sure this time she was safe.

"What! Sherry and Bitters?" cried Lady Kenilworth. Sherry and Bitters was the nickname which his caustic but ever courteous wit had earned for Lord Framlingham in that London world which he had left for an Indian presidency. She was vexed with herself for not having thought sooner of asking for this daughter and taking her under her own wing.

Mrs. Massarene was bewildered by the exclamation; but she was sure of her ground this time, and was not alarmed. "Lord and Lady Framlingham, ma'am," she repeated with zest. "It's cruel hard on me to lose her for so long, but as they're such grand folks one couldn't in reason object."

"Grand folks?" repeated her visitor with amusement. "Poor dear souls! how amused they be. They'd have been sold up if they hadn't gone out; she hated going, said she'd rather live on a crust in England, but he jumped at the appointment; he'd a whole yelling pack of Jews on him; it's quieted them of course; and he's let Saxe-Durham for the term. You'd better tell your husband not to lend him any money, for he never pays, he can't pay; he's sure to get your daughter to ask."

"Lord's sakes, my lady!" murmured Margaret Massarene: life became altogether inexplicable to her; if a gentleman who was a marquis, and governor of a province twice as big as France, they said, were not everything he ought to be, where could excellence and solvency be looked for? *O vertu où vas-tu te nicher?* she would have said had she ever heard of the line.

"But they are very—very—good people, are they not, ma'am?" she asked pathetically.

"Oh, dear, yes; *she* is much too ugly to be anything else, and he's a very good fellow though he does make

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himself hated with his sharp tongue. He's like that monarch, you know, who never did a wise thing and never said a silly one. He's awfully clever, but he can't keep his head above water. But why on earth did you let your daughter go for so long? They'll get marrying her to one of their boys; they've no end of them."

She was not pleased that the young woman was staying with Lord Framlingham; he was a very clever and sarcastic person who might supply his guest with inconvenient and premature knowledge of English society in general and of Cocky and herself in particular.

Mrs. Massarene smoothed down her beautiful gown with a nervous worried gesture.

"Oh, ma'am, Katherine's very discreet, and by her letters all she seems to be thinking about is the white temples and the black men."

"There are no black men in India, and you've have done much better to keep her at home," said her visitor sharply. "What is she like?"

She intended this young woman for her brother Ronald, whatever she might be like.

Maternal pride made Mrs. Massarene's inexpressive and commonplace face for once eloquent and not ordinary: its troubled and dreary expression of chronic bewilderment lighted and changed; her wide mouthed smiled, her colorless eyes grew almost bright.

"If you'll honor me, ma'am, by stepping this way," she said with alacrity as she rose.

"Horses step—people don't," said Lady Kenilworth, unkindly, as she accompanied the person whose instructress and tormentor she was, into a smaller room in which, set as it were upon an altar, a white marble bust stood on a plinth of jasper with a fence of hothouse flowers around it; hanging on the wall behind it was a portrait. Lady Kenilworth looked critically at both bust and portrait. She was surprised to find them what they were.

"A classic face, and clever," she said to the anxious mother. "Are they at all like? The bust's Dalou's, isn't it? And the portrait——"

"They are both the image of her, ma'am," said Mrs.

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Massarene, with great triumph in the effect which they produced. "But the marble pleases me best."

Lady Kenilworth was still looking at them critically through her double eye-glass. She was thinking that the original of that straight and somewhat severe profile was perhaps as well in India until Prince Khris and she had tired of the Massarene vein. On the other hand, unless the girl came home, she could not be married to Hurstmanceaux.

"Your daughter isn't *facile*, is she?" she asked abruptly.

"What, ma'am?" asked the mother, gazing with tears in her eyes, delicious tears, at the bust which would have passed as an Athene or a Clio.

"Well, not easy to deal with—not easy to make believe things; likes her own way, don't she?"

"Well, ma'am," said Mrs. Massarene doubtfully, "sweet-tempered she is, and forgetful of self to a fault, and I wouldn't lay blame to her as obstinate. But if you mean as how she can be firm, well, she can; and if you mean as how she can have opinions, well, she have."

Lady Kenilworth laughed, but she was vexed.

"That's what I do mean. Nobody has that straight profile for nothing; where did she get it?"

"Lord, ma'am, however should I know," said the mother meekly. "She don't take after either of us, that's a fact. The children pick up their own looks in heaven, I think, for often nobody can account for 'em on earth. Look at your own little dears; what black eyes they all have, and you and my lord so fair. I met them in the Park this morning, my lady. Would you let them come and see me some day?"

Lady Kenilworth, to her own extreme amazement and annoyance, felt herself color as the straightforward gaze of this common woman looked in sincerity and in ignorance at her.

"The children shall certainly come to see you if you wish," she said. "But they are naughty little people. They will bother you horribly. And pray, my dear woman, don't say 'My lady,' you set all my nerves on edge."

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Mrs. Massarene humbly excused herself. "It comes natural," she said with a sigh; "I was dairymaid at the Hall. William can't bear me to say I was, but I don't see as it matters."

"William is right," said Lady Kenilworth with a glance at the bust, "and I am sure your daughter will say so too."

Mrs. Massarene shook her head. "Kathleen is quite the other way, ma'am. She says we can't be quality, and why should we pretend to; she angers her father terrible; to tell you the truth, she angers him *so* terrible that it was for that reason I gave in about this long visit to India."

"She is not of her time then," said Lady Kenilworth. "I am afraid she gets those ideas from Framlingham. He is a downright Radical."

"I don't know where she gets them," said Mrs. Massarene drearily. "William always said the only comfort about a girl was that a girl couldn't spite you in politics as a boy might; but if her ideas aren't politics, and the worst sort of politics, I don't know what is, and when you've kept a daughter ten years and more at school where nobody else goes as isn't titled, it's a cross as one doesn't look for to have her turned out a Republican."

Lady Kenilworth laughed with genuine mirth, which showed all her pretty teeth, white, and even and pointed like a puppy's.

"Is she a Republican? Well, that is a popular creed enough now. I am not sure it wouldn't get you on better than being on our side. The Radicals do such a lot for their people, and do it seriously without a grimace. We always"—"put our tongue in our cheek while we do it," she was about to add, when a sense of the imprudence of her confession arrested her utterance of it. "I do wonder, you know, that you belong to us," she hastened to add with that air of candor which so often stood her in good stead; "you would have found Hawarden easier of access than Hatfield."

Margaret Massarene stared.

"But William's principles, ma'am," she murmured, "Church and State and Property; William says them three stand or fall together."

"And he will hold them all up on his shoulders like a

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Caryatide," said Lady Kenilworth, with her most winning smile.

Mrs. Massarene smiled too, blankly, because she did not understand, but gratefully, because she felt that a compliment was intended.

"I can't think, though, that it is wise of him to allow this visit. I think it is exceedingly ill-advised to let her be away from you so long," said her visitor, still gazing through her eye-glass at Dalou's bust, and reflecting as she gazed: "The young woman must be odious, but she is good-looking and Ronnie shall marry her. You don't know my brother?" she said, apparently abruptly, but in her own mind following out her thoughts.

"Meaning Lord Hurstmansceaux? No, ma'am, we haven't that honor."

"We call it Hur'sceaux, please."

"Oh, indeed! As you say O'borne for Otterbourne, and Kers'ham for Kesterholme. Might I ask why those names are cut about so, ma'am?"

"Usage! Why do we say Gore for Gower, and Sellenger for St. Leger?"

"Rebecca Gower was postmistress at Kilrathy when I was a girl," said Mrs. Massarene reflectively. "But Lord! if anybody had clipped *her* down to Gore their letters would have all gone in the swill-tub!"

"You see, we have not the privilege of acquaintance with the postmistress of Kilrathy! Well, I must try and bring my brother to see you. But he is like your daughter; he is not *facile*. Like all those reactionary sort of people, he thinks nobody good enough to know. I never can induce him to make a new acquaintance. But perhaps if he sees this Dalou——" With a pretty smile she left the unfinished sentence to sink into the mind of Katherine Massarene's mother. That simple and candid personage answered the unspoken thought.

"We've had a many asking for Kathleen's hand, ma'am," she said very stupidly. "But neither she or William are easy to please in that way. He looks so high as naught but kings would satisfy him, and she—well, I don't know what she wants, I'm sure, and I don't think she knows herself."

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"Perhaps she's in love with Framlingham!" cried her companion with a disagreeable little laugh, for she was provoked at her unplayed cards being discerned by a person of such limited intelligence.

"A married man, ma'am!" cried Mrs. Massarene, with a countenance so palid from horror that Lady Kenilworth laughed as heartily as if she were hearing Yvette Guilbert sing.

"Oh, my good woman, how much you have got to learn!" she cried gaily.

Mrs. Massarene patted her gown a little irritably, but she dared not resent; though it seemed to her that, after all her William had done for this lovely young lady, it was hard to be called by her a good woman.

"I'll never learn to break the Holy Commandments, ma'am," she said in a tone of offence.

"Oh, you dear droll creature!" cried her visitor, more and more amused.

"But let us go over your lists," she said sharply, realizing that she was wasting valuable time on this goose. "They will want no end of weeding. I will not meet anybody who is not in my own set. You'll get the right people if you don't mix them with the wrong."

With her little gold pencil as a stiletto she set to work mercilessly on her work of expurgation and execution.

Mrs. Massarene looked on helpless but agitated; a sense of wrath was stirring in her mild bosom, but she dared not show it.

"To be called a good woman!" she thought. "Just as I'd speak to the match-seller at the corner of a street!"

The lists thus weeded with such pitiless surgery produced very brilliant gatherings at Harrenden House, and the falconer of Clodion saw nearly all that was fairest and noblest pass up the grand staircase which he guarded.

Margaret Massarene, standing till she was ready to drop at the entrance of her reception rooms, felt her head swim under her tiara as she heard the great names announced by Winters.

The Massarene pile had been touched by the magic wand which could transform it into fashion. To go to Harrenden House became the amusement of the great and

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the ambition of all lesser folks. Not to go to Harrenden House became soon a confession that you were nobody yourself. "*Tenez la dragée haute!*" said their guide, philosopher, and friend; and she made them very exclusive indeed, and would let no one snub them or laugh at them except herself.

"On my soul, she do give worth for her money!" thought William Massarene; and he was pleased to feel that he had not been fooled even when he had bought a barren Scotch estate and compromised his credit in the City by putting a consumptive little sot on the Board of a bank.

"Why don't you bespeak the Massarene young woman for me, Mouse?" said Brancepeth in the boudoir of Stanhope Street, when he heard of the bust of Dalou and the portrait of Orchardson.

"How exactly like a man!" said his friend, blue fire flashing from her eyes. "A little while ago you were mad about the Countess Lynar!"

"It's uncommon like a man to get a pot of money when he can!" said Brancepeth with amusement. "If you did your duty by me, you'd bespeak me those loaves and fishes; you do what you like with the bloomin' cad."

"I would sooner see you dead than married!"

"I be bound you would," muttered the young man. "Lord, that's the sort of thing women call love!"

"Men's love is so disinterested, we know!" said Mouse with withering contempt.

"You want the young woman for Ronnie," continued Brancepeth. "That's your little game. But he won't take your tip."

"Why not?"

"'Cos he's the cussedest crank in all Judee! Let Ronnie please himself and get me the Massarene dollars. I'll give you half I get; and I sha'n't know whether she's a snub nose or a straight one."

Mouse colored with anger. There are things when however necessary it may be to do them, cannot be spoken of without offence.

"How odiously coarse you grow," she observed with severity.

"Oh, bother! you call a spade a spade fast enough

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sometimes. How you do make me think of my old granny Luce!"

"In what do I resemble your old granny Luce?"

Brancepeth was mute. To repeat what his maternal grandmother had said would not pour oil on troubled waters. What the very free-spoken and sharp-tongued old Lady Luce had said was this, when Brancepeth was still in the sixth form at Eton:

"You're such a pretty boy, Harry, the women-folks will be after you like wasps after treacle; take my advice, whatever you do steer clear of the married ones. A married woman always has such a lot of trumps up her sleeve. She sticks like a burr: you can pay off a wench, but you can't pay off her; and if her fancy-man tries to get away she calls in her husband and there's the devil and all to pay. Don't you forget that, Harry."

But he had forgotten it.

"I think I'll go up and see the little beggars," he said, to make a diversion; and he slipped away before she could stop him and went up, four stairs at a time, to the nurseries. There he was extremely popular and much beloved, especially by Jack; and there he was perfectly happy, being a young man of simple tastes, limited intelligence, and affectionate disposition.

He was in the midst of an uproarious game of romps there one day, when Cocky looked in from the doorway with an odd little smile.

"What a good paterfamilias you'll be, Harry, when your time comes!" he said, with a look which made poor Harry color to the roots of his hair.

The head nurse intervened by calling to order noisy, laughing little Jack.

"Don't you see your dear papa at the door, Lord Kersholm?" said that discreet woman.

This day there was no Cocky in the doorway; but the blindman's buff was early in its merry course interrupted by a message from Lady Kenilworth requesting his presence downstairs.

"Oh, Lord, what a pity!" said Brancepeth, as he pulled the handkerchief off his eyes, swung Jack up above his head, and then kissed him a dozen times.

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"I wasn't doing any harm," he said sulkily, as he reëntered the presence of Jack's mother.

"Yes, you were," she said coldly. "I cannot allow you to be upstairs with the children so long and so constantly. Their women must think it very odd; they will talk. No other of my husband's friends enters the nurseries. You must have something to do at the barracks, or the clubs, or the stables, or somewhere. Go and do it."

Brancepeth hung his head. He understood what his punishment would be if he dreamed of marrying the Massarene heiress or any other person whatsoever. Not to see the children any more except as any other of "Cocky's friends" saw them! He was tender-hearted and weak in will; she cowed him and ruled him with a rod of iron. "Lord, how right my grandmother Luce was!" thought the poor fellow as he went down Stanhope Street meekly, feeling in remembrance the touch of Jack's soft, fresh, rosy lips.

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CHAPTER IX.

SOME time before Easter cards had been issued for a Costume Ball at Otterbourne House, *temp.* Charles II., to be given immediately after Easter. The Duke occasionally lent the mansion to his daughter-in-law for such entertainments, never very willingly, for he had always to defray himself the cost of them, and he greatly disliked many members of her set. But he recognized a certain right in his eldest son's wife to have the house sometimes, though he did not concede that it went so far as for her to inhabit it. Those little dark-eyed children running about Otterbourne House, and Harry Brancepeth going in and out of it continually—"Not whilst I live," said the Duke to himself. After him, Cocky must do as he chose. Cocky would probably let it, or sell it at once for a monster hotel.

She arranged her ball greatly to her satisfaction in every detail before she went down for the Easter recess. But there was one thing which had been difficult. That was, to persuade the Duke, who always insisted on revising her list for parties given at his houses, whether in town or country, to allow that of Massarene to remain on it. He inquired who the Massarenes were; and did not inquire only of herself, but of others. He was most decidedly opposed to the presence of such people at Otterbourne House. But Blair Airon was not yet definitely purchased, and it had been given to her to understand that unless the gates of Otterbourne House unclosed, that purchase never might be ratified. All her ingenuity, all her cajolery, all her infinite skill in the manipulation of the minds and wills of men, failed absolutely for a long time with the old Duke. He would not have a man come from God knew where—well, from the State of Dakota, that was equally indefinite—brought within his doors; and everything she could think of to say only rooted him more firmly in his prejudices.

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"Odious, insolent, ill-natured, pigheaded, spiteful, out-of-date old wretch!" exclaimed Mouse, as she read a note from him, and cast it across the room to her husband.

"The Pater? Oh, I say, choose your language," said Cocky.

In his shrivelled heart, dry and sere as a last year's leaf, if there was one remnant of regard and respect left, it was for his father. Besides, like most men, he always disagreed with anything his wife said. He read the note in a glance.

"Won't swallow man from Dakota," he said, under a smile. "Well, I wouldn't have swallowed him if he hadn't greased my throat so well."

"Hush!"

"Who's to hear? Dogs don't blab, bless 'em!"

"I dislike to hear such things said, even in jest."

Cocky chuckled.

"What do you bother the pater about him for? I've swallowed him; society's swallowed him; all the royal folks have swallowed him. Why can't you leave the pater in peace?"

"Why? Why? Because it is absolutely necessary that the Massarenes should be seen at Otterbourne House —seen at *my* ball! The refusal is an insult to *me!* Your father is a hundred years out of date. The country is practically a republic; we shall all have our lands taken from us before long and parcelled out to Jack and Jill. It is ridiculous to be stiff-necked about knowing people. All stiffness of that sort went out when the Hanoverian line came in. What's half the peerage? Titled tradesmen. They have got Richemont. Could your father afford Richemont? There's only one aristocracy now left; it's Money. When I have been getting them everywhere, and everybody so kind about it, what shall I look to people when I don't have them at my own ball? Your father has no consideration for me; he never has. Put it as a personal favor to myself, and you see what he answers—within a week of the ball!"

Cocky listened quietly, because it was diverting to see his wife so displeased and to hear her so incoherent. He liked her to be "in a wax"; he hated to think things

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went as smoothly as they usually did go with her; but he saw the gravity of the dilemma. If Otterbourne would not have the Massarenes, then he and she would be like the farm-girl of fable—"*Adieu, veau vache cochons canvée!*" There might even ensue inquiries from high places, and rebuffs which even the talent of Richemont would not avert. Cocky, to whom the talent of Richemont was agreeable (he lunched and dined whenever he chose at Harrenden House), and more agreeable the master of Richemont (who accepted his signature as if it were Rothschild's), saw that this was one of those exceptional occasions on which he would do better for himself to side with the mother of the four little poppets upstairs.

"I'll see pater about the thing if you're so set on it," he said, with unusual amiability.

"Can you do anything?" she said doubtfully and sullenly.

"Well, I don't know. I'll tell him Billy's reforming me—making an honest man of me in Fleet Street, and that he'll damage me if he shuts his doors on the beggars. Perhaps he'll believe it, perhaps he won't; I'll try."

"I've sent them their cards; tell him so."

"That wouldn't move him a jot; but when I do the eldest son rather well, and make believe to see the errors of my ways, I can get a thing or two out of Poodle—sometimes. After all——"

After all, thought Cocky, there had been days, though it seemed odd enough to think so now, when he had been a clean and pretty little child jumping up on to his father's knee. The duke thought of those far-away days oftener than he did, and Cocky was never ashamed to *exploiter* the remembrance to base ends.

"Go at once, then," said his wife ungraciously.

Cocky nodded. But when he had reached the door he looked back between the curtains, a rather diabolic grin upon his thin fair features.

"I won't tell pater you sold Blair Airon instead of selling Black Hazel. Ain't I magnanimous?"

He disappeared, whilst the Blenheims barked shrilly at his memory. Cocky turned into his own den and

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strengthened his courage with an "eye-opener" of the strongest species; then he took his way to his father's mansion looking on St. James's Park—a beautiful and majestic house built by Christopher Wren, and coveted ardently by an hotel company.

As he spun along the streets in a hansom, for Cocky never went a yard on foot if he could help it, he changed his intended tactics; the reformation dodge would not do; the duke, who could on occasion be disagreeably keen-sighted, would inevitably discover beneath it accepted bills and unworthy obligations.

"I'll touch him up in his loyalty," he thought. "The Poodle's a Cavalier in his creeds."

He found the duke at home with a slight touch of gout in his left foot. "I suppose he comes for money," thought Otterbourne, for Cocky did not cross his threshold once in three months. But Cocky made it soon apparent that his motive was more disinterested.

"You wrote a very sharp note to my wife just now," he said. "It has worried her."

The duke looked at him with sarcastic incredulity.

"Are you going to pose as your wife's champion? It is late in the day."

"No, I ain't," said Cocky. "Do you mind my lighting up, Pater?"

Otterbourne indicated with a gesture that when anything was painful to him an unpleasant trifle did not matter. Cocky lit his cigar.

"You won't let her invite these new people, the Massarenes?"

"Most decidedly not. Is it necessary to inquire?"

"Well, you see, you put her in a hole."

"Your language is not mine; but I conclude you mean that I inconvenience her. I regret it if it be so, but I cannot say otherwise."

"Why did you object to the people?"

"I might more pertinently inquire why did you know them?"

"Everybody does."

"Everybody does—through you, or rather through your wife. At least, so I have heard."

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"Oh, we run 'em, yes."

Otterbourne's silence was eloquent.

"You see it's just that," Cocky pursued with engaging frankness. "When the town's taken 'em on our word it will be such a slap in the face to her if you won't let 'em into your house. We must take Willis's Rooms or some place instead of giving the ball here, but that will make people talk."

"And cost you money," said the duke with significance.

"And there's another thing, you know. *He's* gone to 'em through us. Mouse persuaded him. He'll be rough on us if he hears you set up your back; there might be an awful rumpus; it might be unpleasant for him—the papers would magnify the thing."

"You seem to make a mountain out of a molehill," said the duke with suspicion and impatience. "Go to Willis's Rooms. You can ask any number of shoeblacks there that you please."

"You don't see the thing as it is. You'll get her into trouble with the Prince, and give the Press a lot of brickbats to shy at him: I know you'd regret that. I shouldn't have come to bother you if I didn't think the thing of some importance. After all you can't reasonably exclude a man received at Court."

"My bootmaker goes to Court, and my stationer. Very worthy persons, but they don't dine with me."

"But Massarene won't dine with you: we only want him to come to the ball; and it's her ball and it's not yours."

"The house is mine as yet," said the duke stiffly.

"And will be yours twenty years after I'm tucked up; I'm dead broke—legs and lungs."

"You have ruined yourself."

This was so obvious that Cocky did not notice it.

"Come, Pater, do give in; don't get us in a row with the Prince; when he's accepted these people to please us it would enrage him awfully if he learned you wouldn't let 'em in. He'd asked you about it, of course, or have you asked by somebody."

"And if he asks why I do let them in?"

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"He won't do that; he goes there."

The duke was silent. He sighed. He could not mend the manners or the men of a time which was out of tune with him.

But Cocky's argument had weight. He was of all things kind and chivalrous, and would have no more caused a scandal or a scene than he would have set fire to St. James's Palace next door to him. He reflected on the matter; saw clearly how ugly it was, look at it how you would, and at last conceded permission to let the new people come on the condition, however, that they should not be introduced to himself. "I am too old," he said, "to digest American cheese."

His daughter-in-law, who did not care in the least for this stipulation, went gaily to luncheon at Harrenden House, and interested herself graciously about their costumes, which were a source of great anxiety to both of them.

"May I wear my diamonds?" asked Mrs. Massarene; her diamonds were a great resource and support to her in society.

"Oh, the more diamonds the better?" said Mouse. "Of course you'll go as somebody's grandmother, a Hyde perhaps? You need only telegraph to your people in Paris the epoch; they'll know exactly what to send you; they know your age and appearance."

Margaret Massarene was not pleased, and felt that persons of high rank could be most unpleasantly rude.

"What time is it?" asked her lord, who had not rightly understood.

"Charles the Second's. Do you know who Charles the Second was?" asked Mouse with a malicious little laugh.

"Him as had his head took off?" asked Mr. Massarene.

Her laugh became a melodious scream of delight.

"Oh, you are too delightful! There were no standards in your young days, were there, Billy?"

He reddened angrily under his thick dull skin; he was ashamed of his blunder, and he hated to be called Billy, even by those lovely lips.

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Finally it was decided that he should go as Titus Oates, and should get his dress from Paris, and should learn to say, "O Lard."

"Remember, the man is not to speak to me, not to approach me," said Otterbourne to his daughter-in-law on the day of the ball, when she had come to give a glance at the completed decorations.

"Oh, he quite understands that," she replied. "I have told him you dislike strange men, as some people are afraid of strange dogs."

She laughed gaily as she spoke.

"You might have told him," said the duke drily, "that there are old-fashioned persons who think that their acquaintance should be kept as clean as their hands."

"*That* he wouldn't understand," replied Mouse.

"What makes you protect such people?"

"Oh! I don't know! In other ages everybody had a pet jester; now everybody has a pet *parvenu*. One runs him; it's great fun."

The duke was silent.

"You know," she continued, "he bought Vale Royal of Gerald. Surely all the family ought to be rather nice to him?"

"You surprise me," replied the duke. "I sold Seeton Pastures to a grazier last year; but the obligation to be 'nice' to the purchaser was not in the contract. The sale of Vale Royal was a great disgrace to Roxhall, for his affairs were by no means in such a state as to necessitate or excuse it. But whether his loss or his gain, the sale is certainly his affair; and no one else's."

"Oh, you look at things so—so—stiffly," said his daughter-in-law. "We don't, you know."

"I am aware that you do not," said Otterbourne with significance; and dropped the subject.

When Clare Courcy, lovely as a dream, had been first married to his son, the duke, fascinated out of his better judgment, had admired and been inclined to love his daughter-in-law. Even now he could not be wholly insensible always to the witchery of the prettiest woman in England. He knew her worthlessness; he was aware that his son, bad as he had been before, had become ten times

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worse in every way since his marriage; he could never see the little black-eyed, fair-haired cherubs of the Kenilworth nurseries without a sigh and a curse in his own thoughts; but she at certain moments fascinated him still.

"I may send the bills in to Masters, I suppose?" she asked. Colonel Masters was the duke's agent, a silent, conscientious ex-soldier entirely insensible to her own attractions.

"Certainly. He has my authority to discharge them all. You seem to me to have been more extravagant than usual in your orders."

He looked around him as he spoke; they were standing in a long gallery at the head of the grand staircase. Flowers—flowers—flowers, met the eye in every direction, and the various devices which held the electric lights were concealed on the walls by millions of roses and orchids.

"I suppose it is an old-fashioned idea," said Otterbourne; "but I think a gentleman's house should be thought good enough for his friends, even for his future sovereigns, without all this dressing-up and disguising. Modern fashions are extremely snobbish."

"They certainly are; there I quite agree with you," said his daughter-in-law, and meant what she said. "A fine house like this wants no dressing-up. But we must do as other people do, or look odd."

"Or you think you must," said the duke, viewing with small pleasure a suit of Damascene armor which an ancestor had worn before Acre and Antioch, wreathed and smothered with long trails made of the united blossoms of cattleya and tigredia, whilst within its open vizor two golden orioles sat upon a nest.

"Do you think that in good taste?" he said, pointing to it.

"No; execrable. Nothing done in time is ever otherwise," said Mouse with unusual sincerity. "We are never merry, and we are never sorry; so we heap up flowers to make believe for us at our dances and our burials. You are quite right, Pater, in the abstract. But, you see, we can't live in the abstract. We must do as others do."

"I should have thought the only true privilege of birth

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was to set us free of that obligation," said Otterbourne, to whom his noble old palace looked on these occasions very much like the sweep who was muffled up in evergreens as Jack-in-the-Green on May-day in the little old-world country town which clustered under the hills of his big place, Staghurst Castle.

"Of course he is right enough," she thought, as she drove away. "The house would be ten thousand times better left to itself, and we are all as vulgar as it is possible to be. We have lost the secret of elegance—we have only got display. Why couldn't he give me a blank check, instead of making me send in the bills to Masters? He is such a screw! He wants to save all he can for his precious 'Beric."

Alberic Orme was the duke's second son; he was in Orders, was a scholar of high degree, held one of his father's livings, had married the daughter of a rural dean, and was the especial object of the ridicule, derision, and suspicion of Cocky and his wife.

Judging Lord Alberic by themselves, they attributed to him and his hostile influence every one of the duke's acts which was disagreeable to them. He was the one of his family nearest to the heart and to the ear of the duke; the other two being officers in cavalry regiments, both somewhat spendthrifts and troublesome, and his daughters having married early and being little with him.

To be dressed up like a tomfool, and prate like a poll parrot, as he phrased it in his own thoughts, was unutterably odious to William Massarene, but he was powerless under his enslaver's orders. When the Easter recess was passed and the great night came, he appeared as Titus Oates, looking and feeling very ridiculous with his stout bowed legs in black silk stockings and ruffled breeches; but, after all, it was not worse than Court dress, and it had procured him admittance to Otterbourne House.

"Mind, the man is not to speak to me; not here, nor anywhere even at any time," said the duke to his daughter-in-law, nervously and apprehensively.

"No, he never shall," she promised; but she knew that nobody who would see him there would be aware of the stipulation.

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She had got him to Otterbourne House and had fulfilled one of the clauses of the unwritten contract by which Blair Airon was sold.

The ball was a great pageant and a great success; and she, as the most exquisite of Nell Gwynnes, with all her lovely natural hair curling over her shoulders, was very kind to Titus Oates, guided his squat stiff unaccustomed limbs through the mazes of one quadrille, and even snatched a few moments to present him to some great people; and as her father-in-law made but a brief appearance in the rooms and only spoke with the royal personages present and two or three of his intimate friends, she found little difficulty in avoiding the introduction to him of the "man from Dakota."

"Another time, another time," she said vaguely, and William Massarene was dazzled and quieted.

Cocky was present for half an hour, looking a shaky, consumptive, but not inelegant Grammont, for his figure was slender and his features were good. He was infinitely diverted by the sight of William Massarene.

"Passes muster, don't he, when he don't open his mouth?" he said to Hurstmanceaux. "Lord, what an ugly mug he's got! But the women are always asking for his photo. Haha! we've got it in Stanhope Steet large as life. Pater won't let him be taken up to him, and you won't know him either. You're both wrong. He's thoroughly respectable, and he's got a lot of my paper."

And Cocky, leaving his brother-in-law furious, sneaked off to find the buffets.

It was a very splendid and gorgeous scene in the great house which Wren had designed, and many a famous painter had decorated. Margaret Massarene gazed at it as she sat in solitary state, blazing with diamonds and admirably attired in black velvet and white satin, with that due regard to her age which it had so wounded her to hear suggested. No one noticed her, no one remembered her; but some very stately dowagers near her glanced at her now and then with an expression which made her wish that she were back again in Dakota by her oil-stove and her linen-wringer.

"'Tis a mighty pretty sight," thought Margaret Massa-

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rene as she sat and looked on; "and William's dancing is a thing I never did think to see in all my days. But these women look as if they'd like to duck me in a pond."

Carrie Wisbeach, who was genuinely good-natured, observed her neglected and isolated aspect, and called to her side a fresh-colored pleasant-looking person, old, but hale and bright-eyed, who had taken with success the name of Samuel Pepys.

"Daddy, let me take you up to the Massarene woman," she whispered. "She's so dreadfully disconsolate, and they give extraordinarily good dinners."

He looked and made a little wry face.

"They've got Von Holstein's cook," she added persuasively.

"Really? Richemont?"

"Yes, Richemont; and the best cellar now in London. Come, make yourself pleasant!"

"Ronnie won't know 'em," said the gentleman, glancing down the rooms to where Hurstmanceaux stood, looking very handsome but extremely bored, wearing the dress which a Courcy had worn when ambassador for Charles to the French Court.

"Ronnie!" said Lady Wisbeach. "If Ronnie's fads were attended to we should know nobody except our own families. Come along!"

He reluctantly submitted, deriving courage as he went from the memories of Von Holstein's *chefs*. Her aunts looked unutterable reproach at Carrie Wisbeach as she murmured the inarticulate formula which presented Mr. Gwyllian of Lostwithiel to Mrs. Massarene.

"Pretty sight, isn't it?" he said, as he sank back on cushions beside her.

"A beautiful sight," said Margaret, with unction, "and one as I never thought to see, sir."

He stared and laughed.

"Unsophisticated soul!" he thought. "Why has cruel fate brought you amongst us? Tell me," he murmured, "is it true that you have Von Holstein's cook?"

If she had, he would wait and take her to the supper-tables; if she had not, he would at once leave her to her fate.

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"Meaning the German Ambassador's, sir?" she replied. "Yes, we have."

"Ah!" He decided to take her to supper.

"But I can't say as we like him."

"What?" It was like hearing anybody say they did not like Dante, or Jean de Reszké, or truffles, or comet-claret.

"No, sir, we don't," she answered; "he doesn't cook himself at all."

"Of course he doesn't! You might as well say that a pianist should make the piano he plays on, and shoot an elephant to get ivory for his keys! Richemont—it is Richemont whom you have?—is a surpassing artist."

"'Tis easy to be an artist, sir, if you set a lot of people working and send up their work in your name," said Margaret Massarene. "He don't do naught all day—the under-cooks say so—and he gets more'n a thousand guineas a year; and he called Mr. Massarene an imbecile because he wouldn't eat snails! Now I put it to you, sir, what's the use of being able to pay for the fat of the land if you're to put up with hodmedods out of the hedges?"

Gwyllian laughed so delightedly that the two terrible dowagers turned to glance at him with a Medusan frown.

"After all," he thought, "one does get a great deal more fun out of this kind of people than one ever gets out of one's own." And he took her in to supper, and made himself exceedingly pleasant. He was one of those wise persons who if they cannot be pleasant with others are nothing at all.

Under the gentle exhilaration produced by a little sparkling wine, Mrs. Massarene amused him infinitely, and he cleverly extracted from her more about life in Dakota than the rest of London had learned in a year; he was even made acquainted with the oil-stove and the linen-wringer.

"What a nice kind man! How interested he do seem!" she thought, poor creature, unconscious that the oil-stove and the linen-wringer would make the diversion of a dozen dinner-tables, manipulated with that skill at mimicry which was one of Daddy Gwyllian's social attractions.

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Her husband saw her from a distance, and divined that she was being "drawn"; but he was powerless. He was in waiting on an aunt of Lady Kenilworth's, a very high and mighty person with aquiline features and an immense appetite. It was her garrulous stupidity and her clumsy ingenuousness which made him hate her with a hate which deepened every day. Why had he hung such a millstone round his neck when he had been a farm-lad in County Down? Her good and kindly qualities, her natural sincerity, simplicity, and good nature were all homely instincts, no more wanted in her new life than a pail of fresh milk was wanted at one of the grand dinners at Harrenden House.

Once she had gone back to Kilrathy, the place of her birth, and revisited the pastures, the woods, the streams, which she had known in girlhood. The big house in the midst of the green lands was shut up; bad times had told there as in so many other places in the land; the family she had served was abroad, impoverished, alienated, and all but forgotten. But nothing else was changed. The same great trees spread their vast shadows above the grass; the same footpaths ran through the meadows; the same kind of herds fed lazily, hock deep in clover, the rain shining on their sleek sides, their breath odorous on the misty air; the same kind of birds sang above her head. Every step of the way was familiar to her: here was the stile where she had listened first to William's wooing; there the footbridge which she had crossed every market day; here the black hazel coppice where she had once lost a silver sixpence; there the old oak stump where the red cow had been suddenly taken with labor pains; the rich long grass, the soft grey rain, the noisy frogs in the marsh, the brimming river with the trout up-leaping amongst the sword rush and the dock leaves—all these and a thousand other familiar things were just as they had been five and thirty years before; but none of the people guessed that the lonely lady so richly dressed, walking silently through the water meadows, had once been Margaret Hogan. She did not dare make herself known to any of them; she stole into the churchyard and sat by her parents' graves in the dusk, and gathered a few daisies

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off the nameless mounds, and stole away again feeling ashamed as of some overt act. She saw a barelegged girl going home with the cattle, a switch in her hand and a gleam of sunset light coming through the rain-clouds and touching her red hair and her red kirtle; and in an odd breathless, senseless kind of ingratitude to fate, she wished that her Kathleen—Katherine—were that cow-girl, threading that fragrant twilit path with the gentle kine lowing about her, and a little calf nibbling at a bunch of clover in her hand.

"'Twas a good life when all was said," she murmured, a good life, washed by the dews, freshened with the winds, sweetened by the flowers. She left a bank note at the poor-box of the little church, and returned to her grandeur and greatness, bearing in memory for many a day that pleasant sound of the cattle chewing the wet grasses in the dusk, smelling in memory for many a day the honey scent of the cowslips in the wide pastures by the river. Those memories were shut up in her heart in secret; she would not have dared to speak of them to her husband, or her daughter, but they were there, as the withered daisies were in the secret drawer of her dressing-case; and they kept a little corner of feeling alive in her poor puffed-out stiffened overstretched soul, so overweighted with its cares and honors.

It seemed wonderful to her that she should be a grand rich lady going to Court and wearing diamonds. Through all these years through which the millions had been accumulating she had not been allowed to know of their accumulation, or permitted to cease from privations and incessant labor. More than a quarter of a century had been to her a period of toil quite as severe in one way as the life as a dairy girl had been here in another way. Often and often in the bitter winters and scorching summers of the Northwest she had thought as of a lost paradise of these peaceful pastures, where no greater anxiety had burdened her than to keep her cows in health and have her milking praised.

It was a fine thing to be a fine lady; yes, no doubt she was very proud of her new station in the world. But still, these white satin corsets of Paris which laced her in

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so tightly were less easy than the cotton jacket and the frieze coat; her hands laden with rings or imprisoned in gloves could not do the nimble work which they had been used to do; and the unconcealed contempt of the "smart society" in which she lived had not the warmth and comfort which had been in the jokes and the tears of the farm-girls when a cow upset the milk she had given or the boys came home fresh from a fair. It was all much grander of course in this, but ease was wanting.

"My dear Ronnie! Those new folk your sister's running are too delicious for anything," said Daddy Gwyllian to Hurstmanceaux in the smoking-room. "I took the woman into supper, and on my soul I never laughed more at the Coquelins! I'm going to dine there on Sunday; they've got Richemont."

"More shame for you, Daddy!" said Hurstmanceaux. "I never thought you'd worship the golden calf."

"Well, rich people are pleasant to know," said Daddy Gwyllian. "They're comfortable; like these easy chairs. Borrow of 'em? No, 't isn't that. I never borrowed, or wanted to borrow, half-a-crown in my life. But they're indirectly so useful. And they're pleasant. You can turn lots of things on to them. You can get lots of fun out of them. You can do such a deal for your friends with them. Rich people are like well-filled luncheon-baskets; they make the journey with 'em mighty pleasant. The wine's dry and the game-pie's good, and the peaches are hothouse, and it's all as it should be and no bother."

"I travel on cold tea," said Hurstmanceaux with dry significance.

"Oh, lord, my dear Ronnie, I know you do," said Gwyllian. "But I can't stomach cold tea, and a good many other people can't either. Now your poor folks are cold tea and my rich folks are dry sherry. Economy's a damned ugly thing, you know, at its best. When I go down to shoot with poor folks I know they put me in a cold room and expect my servant to clean my gun. The wealth of my neighbor means my own comfort. The want of means of my friend means my own want of *bien-être* when I go to see him. Naturally I don't go. Equally

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naturally I do go where I am sure to get all I want. I don't want any bills backed, but I do want a warm house, a dry wine, and a good cook. The very good cooks only go nowadays to the very rich people; that is to the *rôture*. I dined at a royal palace last month execrably; I was ill afterwards for twenty-four hours. I know one of the chamberlains very well; I got to the bottom of this horrible mystery; the king pays so much a head for his dinners, wine included! I fled from that capital. The royal dynasty is very ancient, very chivalrous, very heroic, but I prefer the Massarenes."

"I dare say you are right," said Hurstmanceaux bitterly. "The adoration of new wealth is not so much snobbism as selfishness."

"It is not snobbism at all in us," said Gwyllian, "the snobbism is on their side. They kiss our boots when we kick 'em. Why shouldn't we kick 'em if they like it?"

"I don't blame your kicking them for a moment. I blame your legs being under their dinner-tables while you do it."

"That's a matter of opinion," said Daddy. "'*Je prends mon bien où je le trouve*,' and if there's a good cook in a house I go there."

"There are good cooks at the Clubs."

"Passable. But when I dine at a club I have to pay for my dinner," said Gwyllian with a chuckle. "I don't borrow money, but I like to save it. I should not pay a guinea for a peach, but a couple of guinea peaches taste uncommon good when somebody else provides 'em."

"What a beast you make yourself out, Daddy!"

"I'm a man of my time, dear boy," said Gwyllian, as he opened a silver cigarette-case which a pretty woman had won at a bazaar raffle and given to him.

Daddy was popular with both the sexes. Everybody liked him, though nobody could tell why they did so.

He was one of those men who do nothing all their lives except run to and fro society like dogs in a fair. He was of ancient descent, and had enough to live on, as a bachelor, without, as he had averred, ever wanting to borrow half-a-crown of anybody. He had a little nest of three rooms in Albemarle Street, full of pretty things which had

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all been given him chiefly by ladies, and he was seen in London, in Paris, in Homburg, in Cowes, in Cannes, in Monaco, in Biarritz, at the height of their respective seasons with unvarying regularity: farther afield he did not go often; he liked to have his familiar world about him.

He was now an old man, and to the younger generation seemed patriarchal; he had been called Daddy for more years than anybody could remember. But he was healthy and strong, for he had always taken care of himself; he could shoot with the best of them still, and could sit up all night and look fresh and rosy after his shower-bath in the morning.

"You young uns have no stamina," he said once to Brancepeth when he found that young man measuring the drops of his digitalis. "It is the way you were brought up. In my time we were fed on bread and milk, and rice-pudding, and wore low frocks till we were eight or nine, and never even saw what the grown-up folks ate. You were all of you muffled up to your chins in the nurseries, and got at by the doctors, and plied with wine and raw meat, and told that you had livers and lungs and digestions before you could toddle, and given claret and what not at luncheon, and made old men of you before you were boys. Dilitation of the heart, have you got? Hypertrophy, eh? Lord bless my soul, you shouldn't know you've got a heart, except as a figure of speech, when you swear it away to a woman."

Everybody listened to Daddy even in an age which never listens: he was so obviously always right; he had so evidently found out the secret of an evergreen vitality; he was so sagaciously and unaffectedly devoted to himself, his selfishness was just tempered by that amount of good nature, when it cost him nothing, which makes a person popular; he was naturally good-natured and *serviable* and kindly when to be so caused him no difficulty; he would even take a little trouble for people when he liked them, and he liked a great many. On the whole, he was a happy and very sensible creature, and if his existence was one long egotism and inutility—if he were really of no more value than a snail on a cabbage-leaf—if the alpha and omega of existence were comprised for him in his own

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comfort, he was at least pleasant to look at and to listen to, which cannot always be said of persons of great utility. Daddy, moreover, though a very prudent creature, did patch up some quarrels, prevent some scandals, remove some misunderstandings amongst his numerous acquaintances, but it was because he liked smooth waters around his own little barque; life ought to be comfortable, he thought; it was short, it was bothered, it was subject to unforeseen accident, and it was made precarious by draughts, fogs, model stoves, runaway horses, and orange peel on the pavement; but as far as it could be kept so, it ought to be comfortable. All his philosophy centred in that; and it was a philosophy which carried him along without friction.

If Daddy Gwyllian never borrowed, he also never lent half-a-crown; but he got other people to lend it to other people, and this is the next most attractive social qualification which endears us to our friends.

To real necessity he was occasionally very serviceable indeed, so long as it did not put its empty hand in his own pockets; but on the distresses of fine ladies and gentlemen he was exceedingly severe.

Why couldn't everybody keep straight as he himself had always kept?

"Why do you bother about Cocky and your sister?" he said to Hurstmanceaux, whom he had known from a child, as they sat alone in the ducal smoking-room. "If Cocky and your sister had a million a year to-morrow they'd want a million and a half when the year ended. There are people like that: you can't alter 'em. Their receptivity is always greater than what they receive. Their maw's bigger than the biggest morsel you can put into it. Don't strip yourself for them. You might as well go without your bath for fear the Thames should run dry."

Daddy was so fond of pretty women (platonically) that he generally forgave them all their sins, which was the easier because they were not sins against himself. But Lady Kenilworth, though he admired her, he did not like her; he gave her a little sly pat whenever he could.

She yawned when he talked, which nobody else ever

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did, and once, when they were staying at the same country house, when he had offered to ride with her, she had told him in plain terms that she didn't care for old men in the saddle or out of it.

It was not in human nature to forget and forgive such a reply, even though you were the best natured man in the world. He could not do her much harm, for Mouse was at that height of beauty, fashion and renown at which a person is absolutely unassailable; but when he could breathe on the mirror of her charms and dull it, he did so; when he could slip a little stone under the smoothly-rolling wheel of her life's triumphal chariot, he did so. It was but rarely. She was a very popular person. Her elastic spirit, her beauty, her grace, her untiring readiness for pleasure, all made her welcome in society; her very insolence was charming, and her word was law on matters of fashion. She was often unkind, often malicious, always selfish, always cruel, but these qualities served to intimidate and added to her potency. People trembled for her verdict and supplicated for her presence. Whether she were leading the cotillon or the first flight, whether she was forming a costume quadrille or bringing down a rocksetter, she was equally admirable, and although she excelled in masculine sports she had the tact always to remain exquisitely feminine in appearance and style. She had had also the tact and the good luck always to preserve her position. She had always done what she liked, but she had always done it in such a way that it had never injured her.

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CHAPTER X.

A WEEK or two later Hurstmanceaux saw a paragraph in the morning papers which made him throw them hastily aside, leave his breakfast unfinished, and go to his sister's house in Stanhope Street. Her ladyship was in her bath. "Say I shall return in half an hour. I come on an urgent matter." Leaving that message with her servants he went to walk away the time in the Park. It was a fine and breezy morning, but Hurstmanceaux, who always hated the town, saw no beauty in the budding elms, or the cycling women, or even in Jack or Boo, who were trotting along on their little black Shetlands. When the time was up he waited restlessly another half hour in his sister's boudoir, where he felt and looked like a St. Bernard dog shut up in a pen at a show.

She at last made her appearance, looking charming, with her hair scarce dry gathered loosely up with a turquoise-studded comb and a morning-gown of cloudy lace and chiffon floating about her; a modern Aphrodite.

"You have made your husband a director in the City," said Hurstmanceaux without preface, almost before she had entered the room.

She was prepared for the attack and smiled, rather impertinently.

"What does it matter to you, Ronnie?"

"A director of a bank!"

"'Tisn't your bank, is it?"

"A director of a bank!" he repeated. It seemed to him so monstrous, so shocking that he had no words left.

"They won't let him into the strong-room," said Cocky's wife. "It may be rather absurd; but it isn't more absurd than numbers of other things—than your being asked to be a mayor, for instance."

"If I had accepted I should not have disgraced the mayoralty."

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"Cocky won't disgrace anything. They'll look after him."

"Who did it?"

"Is that your business, dear Ronnie?"

"Oh, of course, it was that miserable cad from Dakota, whom you forced through the gates of Otterbourne House."

"If you know, why ask?"

"What an insult to us all! What a position to put us in! When everybody's seen the man at your ball where we all were——!"

His indignation and emotion checked his utterance.

His sister laughed a little, but she was bored and annoyed. What business was it of his? Why could she not be let alone to arrange these little matters to her own convenience in any ingenious way she chose?

"How could you make the duke appear to play such a part?" said Hurstmanceaux. "He is the soul of honor and of proper pride. What have you made him look like? It is the kind of thing that is a disgrace to the country! It is the kind of thing that makes the whole peerage ridiculous and contemptible. Imagine what the Radical press will say! Such scandalous jobbery justifies the worst accusations."

"Don't read the Radical newspapers then. I shall read them, because they will be so deliciously funny. They are always so amusing about Cocky."

"You have singular notions of amusement. I do not share them."

"I know you don't. You are always on stilts. You never see the comedy of Cocky."

"I do not see the comedy of what is disreputable and dishonorable. His father will be most cruelly distressed."

"He should give us more money then. We must do what we can to keep ourselves; Poodle never helps us. Well—hardly ever."

Hurstmanceaux emitted a sound very like a big dog's growl.

"Otterbourne has been endlessly good to you. It is no use for him or anybody else to fill a sieve with water."

"Why don't he give us the house? We are obliged to

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pay fifteen hundred a year for this nutshell, while he lives all alone in that huge place."

"Why should he not live in his own house? What decent gentleman would have Cocky under his roof?"

"You have no kind of feeling, Ronnie. I ought to have Otterbourne House. I have always said so. I can't give a ball here. Not even a little dance. Poodle might keep his own apartments, those he uses on the ground floor there, but we ought to have all the rest."

"He allowed you to have that ball there the other night, and all the cost of it fell on him."

"That is a great deal for him to do certainly! To lend us the house once in a season when it is our right to live in it altogether!"

"He does not think so."

"No! Horrid selfish old man! Pretending to be young, too, with his flossy white hair and his absurd flirtations. Would you believe that he even made difficulties about our keeping our horses at his mews!"

"He probably knew that it meant his paying the forage bills. The duke is most generous and kind, and I think you ought to be more grateful to him than you are."

"Oh, rubbish!" said Mouse, infinitely bored. "People who hate you to amuse yourself, who want you to live on a halfpenny a day, and who say something disagreeable whenever they open their lips, are always considered to be good to one. There is only one really good-natured thing that we ever wanted Poodle to do, and that was to let us live in Otterbourne House; and he has always refused. I am certain he will go on living for twenty years merely to keep us out of it!"

"Don't wish him in his grave. As soon as your husband gets Otterbourne House he will sell it to make an hotel. A company has already spoken to him."

"Isn't it in the entail?"

"Perhaps. I cannot say. Ask your lawyer. But I know that an hotel company has made overtures to him for purchase or lease in event of the duke's death—may it be many a day distant! He is an honest gentleman, and you and your husband and your cursed cad out of Dakota have made him look to English society as if he were

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capable of having sold the honor of entrance to his house for a mess of pottage for his son's thirsty maw."

"My dear Ronald, how you excite yourself! Really there is no reason."

Hurstmanceaux looked at her very wistfully.

"Can't you see the dishonor of what you've done?" he said impatiently. "You coax and persecute Otterbourne until he allows you to take those new people to his house, and then you let the cad you take there make your husband a director of a bank of which the man is chairman! Can't you see to what comment you expose us all? Of what wretched manœuvring you make us all look guilty? Have you any perception, no conscience, no common decency? If Cocky were another kind of man than he is, such a thing would look a job. But being what he is, the transaction is something still more infamous."

She listened, so much amused, that she really could scarcely feel angry.

"My dear Ronald," she said very impertinently, "you have a morality altogether of your own; it is so extremely old-fashioned that you can't expect anybody to make themselves ridiculous by adopting it. As for 'a job,' isn't the whole of government a job? When you've cleaned out Downing Street it will be time to bring your brooms in here."

At that moment Cocky put his head in between the door curtains and nodded to Hurstmanceaux. "She's made me a guinea-pig, Ronnie," he said, with his little thin laugh. "Didn't think I should take to business, did you? Have you seen the papers? Lord, they're such fun! I've bought ten copies of *Truth*."

His wife laughed.

"It's no use reading *Truth* to Ronnie. He's no sense of fun; he never had."

"I have some sense of shame," replied Hurstmanceaux, looking with loathing on his brother-in-law's thin, colorless, grinning face. "It is an old-fashioned thing; but if this wretched little cur were not too feeble for a man to touch, I would teach him some respect for it with a hunting-crop."

Then he pushed past Cocky, who was still between the

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door-curtains, and went downstairs to take his way to Otterbourne House.

Cocky laughed shrilly and gleefully.

"Jove! what a wax he's in," said Cocky, greatly diverted. "Just as if he didn't know us by this time!"

"He is always so absurd," replied Mouse. "He has no common sense and no perception."

"He ought to go about in chain armor," said Cocky, picking up *Truth* and reading for the fourth time, with infinite relish, the description of himself as an "Hereditary Legislator in Mincing Lane." "I am not a hereditary legislator yet," he said as he read. "As I don't get the halfpence, why should I get the kicks? That's what I said to the mob in the park. Break the pater's windows, don't break mine. I'm plain John Orme, without a shilling to bless myself with, and the beggars cheered me! They'll cheer you for any rot if they're only in the mood for it; and if they aren't in the mood, you might talk like Moses and Mahomet, they'd bawl you down—oh, get out you little beasts, damn you!"

This objurgation was addressed to the Blenheims, who, suddenly becoming aware of his presence, made for his trousers with that conviction that his immediate destruction would be a public service, which they shared with the editor of *Truth*.

Hurstmanceaux walked through the streets and felt his ears tingle as he heard the newsboys shouting the names of newspapers.

His sister had said rightly; he was not a man of his time; he was impetuous in action, warm in feeling, sensitive in honor; he had nothing of the cynical morality, the apathetic indifference, the cool opportunism of modern men of his age. He was no philosopher, and he could not bring himself to smile at an unprincipled action. He felt as ashamed as though he were himself at fault, as he entered the duke's apartments in Otterbourne House.

Hurstmanceaux and the duke had much regard for each other, but their conversation was usually somewhat guarded and reserved, for the one could not say all he thought of Otterbourne's son, and the other could not say all he thought of Ronald's sister. There were many

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subjects on which they mutually preserved silence. But this appointment of Kenilworth seemed so monstrous to both that it broke the reserve between them. They each felt to owe the other an apology.

"My dear Ronald," said the duke, holding out his hand, "I know why you have come. I thank you."

"I dare not offer any plea in her defence," replied Hurstmanceaux huskily; "I can only tell you how grieved I am that your constant kindness and forbearance to my sister should meet with so base a requital."

The duke sighed.

"I am bound in honor to remember that the basest of men is her husband—and my son!"

They were both silent.

The morning papers were lying on a table by the duke's side, amongst them the green cover of *Truth*.

"That is no excuse for her," said her brother at length. "This thing is of her devising much more than it is his."

"There are women who are a moral phylloxera," replied Otterbourne. "They corrupt all they touch. But in fairness to her I must say that it was chiefly my son who persuaded me to let this man Massarene into my house. They made me an accomplice in a job! Perhaps," the duke added with a sad smile, "the world knows me well enough to give me credit for having been an unconscious accomplice—for having been a fool, not a knave!"

To these two honest gentlemen the matter was one of excruciating pain, and of what seemed to them both intolerable humiliation. But society, though it laughed loudly for five minutes over the article on an hereditary legislator, forgot it five minutes later, and was not shocked: it is too well-used in these days to similar transactions between an improverished nobility, with unpaid rents and ruinous death-duties, and a new-born plutocracy creeping upward on its swollen belly like the serpent of Scripture.

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CHAPTER XI.

A YOUNG woman, dressed in white cambric, with the deep shade of a magnolia grove cast upon her as she sat on the marble steps of an Oriental garden, read of these brilliant festivities in various English journals whose office it is to chronicle such matters; and as she read she frowned, and as she frowned she sighed. "Oh, the waste, the folly, the disgrace!" she murmured as she pushed the newspapers away from her. For she had peculiar views of her own, and had little or nothing in common with her generation or with her procreators. She looked very like her bust by Dalou as she thrust the offending journals off her lap.

"I am a *déclassée*," she said to herself as she sat amongst the rhododendrons and the monkeys. "All they have spent on me cannot make me anything more. They should have left me in the place which they occupied when I was born. I would sooner go out as a common servant any day than be forced to witness their ignominy and live in their suffocating wealth, to see the laugh in the eyes of the people they toady, and overhear the ridicule of those who crowd to their supper-table. If he would only disown me—cut me off with a shilling!"

"What's the matter, my dear? Bad news from England? Parents ill?" said a mellow and cheerful voice, as the temporary owner of terrace and magnolia grove, Lord Framlingham, came out of the house and across the rough grass, accompanied by his two inseparable companions, his cigarette and his skye-terrior.

She picked up one of the newspapers and pointed to a paragraph in it.

"They must be the laugh of London!"

"Oh, my dear, you don't know London," said her host as he read. "They will be the idols of London, the very Buddha of solid gold that its smart people most de-

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light to adore. Look at the whole thing as a comedy, my child, and you will enjoy it."

"I once spoke to a clown's wife at a circus," said Katherine Massarene. "While the clown was making the audience scream with laughter, she was crying. 'I can't help crying,' she said, 'to see my man make a butt and a guy of himself. He's nabbut a tomfool to them, but he's my man to me.' I am as foolish as the clown's wife."

"I can't admit the analogy," said her host. "I think you take the thing too seriously. Your people's position is a common one enough in our days. When anybody has made a heap of money they are never happy till they get a mob of smart beggars to crowd round 'em and pick their pockets. How would smart society go on unless there were these feeders for it to fatten on? If I were your father I should keep my money in my pocket and snap my fingers at smart society. But then, you see, I know what smart society is and he doesn't."

"But why should he want to know? He is not made for it. It only laughs at him."

"Oh, pardon me, I am sure it does more than laugh; I am sure it plunders him as well. I only hope that he will know when to cry 'stop, thief!' for if he doesn't all his millions will go into the maw of his fine friends."

Katherine Massarene sighed.

"My father will never lose except when he chooses to do so. If they use him, he uses them. It is a *quid pro quo*. It is a question of barter. But that is what is so disgraceful about it."

"I have said," replied her host, "I think if I were an intelligent man who had made a pot of money by my own exertions, as Mr. Massarene has done, that I should not care a damn (excuse the word) for all the fine folks in creation. Certainly I should not care to waste my money upon them. But the fact is that all these new men do care for that and that alone. They appear wholly to underrate themselves and their own accomplishment, and care only to be rooked by a set of idle loungers with handles to their names. It is not they who will ever destroy the Upper House."

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"No," said his guest bitterly. "An earl can see and say that the days of the Upper House are numbered, but my father regards it as the holy of holies because he means to seat himself in its gilded chamber."

"It's Joe Chamberlain's reason too," said Framlingham with a chuckle. "When we make peers of the tradesmen, my dear, we know what we are about; we are soldering our own leaking pot."

"Solder it with other men's smelted gold? You had better break it up honestly as a thing which has had its day and is done with."

"Poor old pot! Perhaps it would be better to bury it for good and all on Runnymede island. But I think you exaggerate a little—I must say you exaggerate. And you totally ignore a fact which has been put on record by every English sociologist and historian, that it has been its frank admission to its ranks of *novi homines* which has kept the English aristocracy vigorous and popular."

She gave a scornful gesture of denial.

"It is the *novi homines* who have degraded the English aristocracy. Pardon me if I contradict you. Mr. Mallock has written very kind and possibly very just things of your nobility, but he has forgotten to satirize its most shameful infirmity, its moral scrofula—its incessant and unblushing prostration of itself before wealth *quâ* wealth. It likes hothouse pines and can no longer afford to keep them for its own eating. It can only grow them for sale and eat them at the tables of those who buy them."

"That is very severe!"

"Who would be less severe who had seen anything at all of Paris, of London, of Nice, of Biarritz, of any place where modern society disports itself?"

Framlingham laughed.

"My dear Miss Massarene, you delight me beyond expression, but I can imagine that you are, to a parent who adores princes and means to die a peer, rather—rather—forgive a vulgar word—rather a handful."

"My father has purchased a place called Vale Royal," continued Katherine. "You know it? Well, he wishes to be there *plus royaliste que le roi*. In the leases he gives to his farmers they are bound over to pay £40 for every

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pheasant killed or maimed on their ground. Is it not out-heroding Herod? He cares nothing for such trumpery sport himself; he has killed grizzlies and negroes and train-lifters; he would care nothing to fire at a flock of frightened hand-fed birds; but he wishes to tempt princes and lords to his coverts and to see the bags made on his estate cited in newspapers. Who set him that base example? Princes and lords themselves."

"No estates would be kept up but for the game," said her host, rather feebly as he felt.

"What satire can be so withering as such a statement? There is then no love of hereditary lands, no sense of woodland beauty, no interest in fur or feather without slaughter attached to them, no tenderness for tradition and for nature? Nothing, nothing whatever, of such pride in and affection for the soil itself as Shakspeare felt, who only owned a little rural freehold? Who can condemn you as utterly as you condemn yourselves?"

"I think we are rather useful sometimes," he said humbly.

"Oh, very! You vote against marriage with a deceased wife's sister and maintain the game laws!

"I am not ashamed of my parents' origin, Lord Framlingham, I assure you," she added after a pause. "I am ashamed that they are ashamed of it."

"I understand, my dear, and I sympathize, though I suppose not many people would do either. You see, we all have our crosses. My daughters have to endure the misery of a conspicuous rank with wholly inadequate means—a more trying position than you can imagine."

"I should not mind that."

"Oh, yes, you would. It is humiliation at every turn. It is to be checked in every generous impulse, to spend half your time in efforts to make a five-pound note do the work of ten sovereigns; it is to wear your George and Garter over a ragged shirt, and knock your diamond tiara against the roof of a hackney cab. I know what I am talking about, my dear, as most unhappy English landowners do in this year of grace. I know that there is no misery so accursed as the combination of high place and narrow means. I came out here to relieve the strain a

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little. It was worse for the women than for me. You, my dear, are a high-mettled pony which kicks at carrying the money-bags. But my poor girls are high-mettled ponies which sweat under the halter and the cobble. That's a good deal worse. You'll have to buy a fine name with your big dower. But they will have to take what offers first, for they must go to their husbands portionless, or nearly so. And we were Thanes in Alfred's time, my dear, and we fought for Harold tooth and nail, and we were at Runnymede, and at Bosworth, and at Tewkesbury, and all the rest of it, and our name is as old as the very hills round the Wrekin; and that, you see, is what an ancient lineage is worth in these days. Your father has the better part."

Katherine shook her head.

"And honor?" she said in a low tone.

Lord Framlingham laughed grimly.

"When one is in debt to one's banker and one's tradesmen, and has to let one's place to a sugar-baker, the less said about honor the better. I wish I were a monkey—don't you wish you were one? They get such fun out of each other's tails, and it must be such a jolly life swinging on branches and living on fruits. And if you like ancient lineage look at theirs!"

She smiled, but her heart was heavy. She knew that she could not alter her fate, and she loathed it.

"Do not misunderstand me," she said, with a passing flush coming on her face. "Do not think me more stoical or philosophical than I am. It is probably pride not humility which makes me suffer so much from my sense of my parents' present position. If I had been born in your class, in your world, I should probably have been odiously arrogant."

"I do not think you could be 'odiously' anything, my dear," said Lord Framlingham with a smile.

"Oh, yes, I can; I know it, I feel it, I regret it, and yet I cannot help it. When I am in their world, to which we have no right, to which we shall be only welcomed for reasons as discreditable to ourselves as to those who welcome us, I know that I offend everyone, and that I afflict, surprise and disappoint, my parents; but I cannot be oth-

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erwise; it is all I can do to keep in unspoken the bitter truths which rise to my lips."

"The *amari aliquid* was never enclosed in a fairer crystal sphere," said her host gallantly.

"I never would have left my mother," she added, "but I could do nothing. I was only the helpless spectator of a kind of effort which is in my sight the most ignoble, the most foolish of all, the endeavor to appear what one is not, and never can be."

"You take it too much to heart," said her companion. "You do not make allowance for the times. Your people are only doing what every person who has made money does on a small scale or a big scale, according to their means. Mr. Massarene is immensely rich, and so his aspirations are very large too."

"Aspirations! To get on in society, to have great persons to dinner, to represent in Parliament the interest of a constituency he had never heard of a year ago, to get a title, though my brothers are all dead, to entertain troops of people who scarcely know his name and have hardly the decency to pretend to know it, do you call that aspiration? It is more like degradation. Why cannot he remain in obsurity spending his vast fortune for the good of others instead of squandering it on idle people, impudent people, worthless people, people to whom he is a jest, a by-word and a jeer?"

"My dear young lady, money is power," said Lord Framlingham. "It is nothing new that it should be so; but in other ages, it was subordinate to many greater powers than itself. Now it is practically supreme; it is practically alone. Aristocracy in its true sense exists no longer. War in its modern form is wholly a question of supply. The victory will go to who can pay most and longest. The religious orders, once so absolute, are now timid anarchronisms quaking before secular governments. Science, which cannot move a step without funds, goes cap in hand to the rich. Art has perished nearly. What is left of it does the same thing as science. The Pope, who ought to be a purely spiritual power, is mendicant and begs like Belisarius. What remains? Nothing except trade, and trade cannot oppose wealth, because it lives

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solely through it. For this reason, money, mere money, with no other qualities or attractions behind it, is omnipotent now as it never was before in the history of the world. It is not one person or set of persons who is responsible for this. It is the tendency of the age, an age which is essentially mercenary and is very little else! In politics, as in war and in science, there is no moving a step without money and much money. The least corrupt election costs a large outlay. Royalty recognizing that money is stronger than itself, courts men of money, borrows from them, and puts out in foreign stocks where it borrows as a reserve fund against exile. You see there is no power left which can, or dare, attempt to oppose the undisputed sway of money. A great evil, you say? No doubt."

She sighed; she recognized the truth of all he said; but she loathed the fact she was compelled by her reason to acknowledge.

"'When she's convinced against her will
She's of the same opinion still,'"

quoted Framlingham. "Come, my dear, let's go and have a game of tennis."

Katherine Massarene, whose future was a subject of lively speculation to many, was now twenty-one years old; she looked much more than that then, and twenty years hence will probably look no older. At five years of age, notwithstanding her poor mother's tears and prayers, she had been sent to the care of a gentlewoman in England, who lived at Eastbourne and received only half a dozen children to educate, with two of her own. The lady had been recommended to William Massarene by the English minister at Washington; and the influence of that gentleman had been exercised in persuading her to consent to receive against her rules a little ignorant obscure brat from Dakota.

"Make her happy and keep her well, ma'am, for she's all we've got," wrote her poor mother.

"Make her English, ma'am, and fit to hold her head with the highest, for she'll mean gold," wrote her father.

The lady disliked excessively accepting a charge

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which was alien to her habits and might injure the tone of her house; but she was under obligations to the English minister, and reluctantly consented to take into her home this one little girl who had great astonished unwinking eyes like an owl's, and who said to her with a dreadful nasal accent: "Don't grin when I speak, or I'll hit yer."

For twelve years she remained under this lady's care, being trained in all exercises of the mind and body, and becoming a calm cold high-bred girl who looked as if she had a thousand years behind her of old nobility and gracious memories. Of her parents she saw nothing, and only heard that they were extremely rich. But the orthography of her mother's letters, and the style of her father's few lines, always made her uneasy, and the recollections of life in Dakota were not as absolutely obliterated as her parents desired. But of those she never spoke; she divined what was expected of her. Those recollections became increasingly painful as with increasing perception she could construe them by induction.

When in her eighteen the year her parents came for the first time to England, she could only see in them strangers, and strangers who, alas! had nothing of that attraction which bridges the distance between age and youth. If what she felt on meeting them was an agony of disappointment and a sense of shame, more acute because it was shut close in her own breast, they were themselves not less chagrined. When they first saw her, her parents both thought that she did not give them great results for the vast sums they had spent on her, and that really they would have turned her out smarter if they had had her brought up in New York. The art of gilding gold and painting lilies is at its perihelion in the empire city. He especially was disappointed in her at first; he had expected her to make more show, to have more color, to be more swagger, as the slang words ran; this tall, proud, slender young woman, who wore generally black or grey in the day, and white in the evening, and put on no jewelry of any kind, seemed to him to give him poor value for the many thousand of dollars he had spent on her. He had intended her to be ultra fashionable, ultra chic, always in

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the swim, always in the first flight; on race-courses, on yacht decks, on the box seat of drags, at aristocratic river clubs, at exclusive and crowded little suppers after theatres.

"I wanted a gal of fashion, not a school-marm!" he said with much disgust, when the lady who had brought her up told him that she was the finest Hellenist of her sex.

He did not know what a Hellenist was, but he understood that it was something connected with teaching. What he wanted was something very showy, very sensational, very superfine. But Katherine did not like fashionable life at all. A very little of it wearied her. She did not like a man to lean his elbows on a little, round, *tête-à-tête* supper-table, and stare at her, with his eyes within six inches of her necklace, and his champagne and cigar-scented breath hot in her face; and she did not think the situation made more agreeable by the fact that the starer was illustrious. She infinitely preferred to be alone in the music-room with her violin and harmonium, or in the library comparing Jowett's Dialogues with the original. It is easy to understand that she was a great disappointment to her father, though a sort of sullen pride in her was wrung out of him when he saw how indifferent she appeared to the great folks he adored, yet at the same time how at home she seemed in the mystic arena of that society which made him shake in his shoes, strong, hard, shrewd man though he was.

Except the archduke who insisted on becoming a skipper of a timber-brig, so infuriating and insensate a flying in the face of a fair fate had never been known. Katherine Massarene for her part did not enter, or try to enter into his feelings, as no doubt it should have been her filial duty to do. She had some of his stubbornness, and a pride of her own kind which made her unyielding. Her numerous teachers, male and female, had all found her of unusual intelligence and she had studied the classics with ardor and thoroughness. She could say extremely caustic and witty things, but she generally was merciful and forbore to say them. She had a vast reserve of sound and unusual knowledge, but she endeavored to conceal it, dis-

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liking all display, and being by nature very modest. As, little by little, she began gradually to understand the position of her parents, she suffered from it acutely. If she could, with a clear conscience, have done so, she would have liked to renounce all their wealth and grandeur and earn her own living, which she could have earned very well as a musician, or a professor of history or dead languages.

She said so once to her father, on his arrival in England, and the rage of the taciturn, ruthless man was so terrible that her mother on her knees entreated her never to allude to such an idea.

"You are all we have left," she said, weeping. "Your brothers and sisters all died in that horrible West. You are the sole one he has to look to for bearing his name and glorifying his money. You are heir and heiress both, Kathleen. Has he slaved and spared and laid by thirty years and more only that the sole begot of his loins shall disgrace him as a menial?"

"Rise up, my dear mother; we will not speak of it again," said Katherine, a mere schoolgirl then of seventeen. "We might discuss and argue for ever, neither my father nor you would ever see these things as I see them."

And with great self-control, most rare in one of her age, she renounced her dreams of independence and never did allude again in any way to them.

She soon perceived that whatever chance she might have had of influencing her mother, she had none whatever of moving her father: if she had stood in his way, he would have brushed her aside, or trampled her down; he had not made his money to lose the enjoyment of it for the quips and cranks of a crotchety child.

Her indifference to all which fascinated and awed himself compelled his reluctant respect, and the serene hauteur of her habitual manner made him feel awkward and insignificant in her presence. He was in some respects, when he pitted himself against her, compelled unwillingly to acknowledge that she was the stronger of the two. She had hurt him enough by the mere accident of her sex. He never forgave her that she had lived whilst her brothers had died. He had no affection for her, and

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only a sullen unwilling respect, which was rung out of him by seeing her ease in that world where he was uneasy and her familiarity with those great persons before whom he was always himself dumb and frightened and distressed.

So far, at least, the money spent on her had not been wasted, it had made her one of them. For this he held her in respect, but she could not move him a hair's breadth from his ambitions or his methods of pursuing them.

These methods were to her more refined taste and more penetrating vision absurd and odious. She knew that the great world would use him, rook him, feed on him, but would always laugh at him and never see in him anything except a snob. She knew that every invitation given to him or accepted from him, every house-party which he was allowed to gather, or allowed to join, every good club which he was put up for, every great man who consented to dine with him, were all paid for by him at enormous cost, indirectly indeed but none the less extravagantly. She knew that he would in all likelihood live to do all he had aspired to do; to get into the Commons, perhaps to get into the Cabinet, to receive royalty, to shake hands with princes of the blood, even perhaps to die a peer. But she knew that all this would be done by purchase, by giving money, by lending money, by spending money largely and asking no questions, by doing for the impoverished great what Madame de Sevigné called manuring the ground.

To her taste, success and rank procured in such a manner left you precisely where you were before its purchase. She knew that to a society which you only enter on sufferance you remain always practically outside on the door-mat; and she did not understand that to the soul of the snob even the dust of the door-mat is sweet. She did not understand either that in her father's case the door-mat was but one of the preliminary stages of the triumphant career which he had mapped out in his brain when he had first put *one dollar on another* in Dakota.

She early perceived that her parents looked to her for assistance in their ambitions, but she was obdurate in giving them none; they called her undutiful, and undutiful she might be; but she felt that she would rather

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be guilty of any offence whatever than become degraded and servile. So extreme was her resistance on this point that one evening it brought an open rupture with her father, and that exile to India of which Mrs. Massarene had not told all the truth when exhibiting Dalont's bust of her daughter.

The winter before their acquaintance with Lady Kenilworth the Massarenes had been at Cannes and Monte Carlo, following that smart world of which they still vainly pined to enter the arena. They had not as yet found their guide, philosopher, and friend in the fair mother of Jack and Boo, and William Massarene was beginning to fear that gold was not the all-potent solvent he had believed it. But a very high personage, whose notice would have had power to lift them at once into the empyrean was also at Cannes at that period, and the white-rose skin and admirable form of Katherine Massarene attracted him, and he desired that she should be presented to him. Very unwillingly, very coldly, she had submitted to her fate at a public ball to which she had been taken. The great gentleman asked her to waltz. Neither his age nor his figure were suited to the dance, but women were nevertheless enchanted to be embraced by him in its giddy gyrations. Katherine excused herself and said that she did not waltz.

The great gentleman was annoyed but attracted; he sat out the dance by her side on a couch in a little shady corner under palm trees such as he especially favored. But he made very little way with her; she was chilly, reserved, respectful. "Take your respect to the devil," thought the misunderstood prince.

"Why are you so very unkind to me, Miss Massarene?" he said in a joking fashion, which would have convulsed with joy every other women in those rooms.

"There can be no question of unkindness from me to yourself, sir," she replied more distantly still, and she looked him straight in the eyes: he was not used to being looked at thus.

He had drunk more wine than was good for him; he tried to take her hand, his breath was hot upon her shoulder.

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"I'll dine with your father if *you* ask me," he murmured.

A whole world of suggestion was in the simple phrase.

Katherine Massarene drew her hand away.

"Sir," she said very distinctly; "my father was a cowherd and my mother a dairy-woman. I do not know why you should do them the honor to dine with them, sir, merely because they earned money in America!"

Her companion had never received such a "facer" in all his fifty years of life. Like his own speech it suggested innumerable things. He grew very red and his glassy eyes became very sullen.

He was silent for a few moments. Then he rose and offered her his arm.

"Allow me to take you back to your chaperon," he said in glacial accents which she infinitely preferred to his familiarity.

"What have you done to him?" said that lady as he left her with a ceremonious bow.

"I have told him a truth," said Katherine indifferently. "I suppose it is too strong diet for him. He is not used to it!"

"I should think not indeed!" said the lady, much disturbed. "What can you have said?"

"He will probably tell people," said Katherine. "If he do not, I shall not."

He did, not very wisely, tell two of his boon companions that same night as they sat smoking with him.

Of course the story ran about the Riviera next day from Monaco to Hyères, taking protean forms, and changing with every tongue that told it.

One of its versions, one of the most accurate, reached the ears of William Massarene.

His nickname in the States had been "Blasted Blizzard," and his temper was such as corresponded with the name. His wrath was terrible. From his point of view it was justified. His wife, trembling like a leaf in a hurricane, was paralyzed with fear. His daughter remained calm. She did not for an instant admit that she was at fault, although she regretted that any cause for anger should arise between her and her parents.

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"You shall apologize!" he swore a dozen times.

"I shall certainly never do that," said Katherine with contemptuous composure.

"You shall apologize in public!"

"Neither in public, nor in private."

"You shall go on your knees to him, if I flog you on to them!" yelled Mr. Massarene.

"My dear father, pray keep within the laws of that 'good society' into which you have been so anxious to enter," she said, with a delicate scorn, which he felt through all his tough hide like the tingling strokes of the whip with which he threatened her.

"Cannot *you* understand, mother?" she said wistfully. "Surely you must see, must feel, the insult that it was?"

"Oh, my dear, don't appeal to me!" said her mother with a sob. "Great folks aren't like other folks; and your father must know best."

"How dare you turn to your fool of a mother!" he yelled. "Is it she whose dollars have dressed you fine, and cockered you up amongst blood-fillies all these years?"

"I regret that I have cost you so much. But if you will allow me, I will relieve you of my presence and maintain myself," she said, with a tranquillity which made her father's rage choke him as though he were on the point of apoplexy.

"Did I bring you up amongst duchesses' daughters that you might disgrace me?" he cried, with a foul oath.

From his point of view it was hard on him, unjust, a very abonination of Providence. There were four hunhred young women in London, four thousand in Great Britain, who would have asked nothing better than to be beautifully dressed, to have abundance of pocket-money, to ride thoroughbred hacks in the Park, to pay court to great people, and to make themselves agreeable and popular in society. There was not, indeed, one young woman in ten millions who would have quarrelled with such a fate; and that extraordinary and solitary exception was his daughter. It was not wonderful, it was scarcely even blamable, that William Massarene was beside himself with chagrin and rage.

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A thousand other men had daughters who asked nothing better than to be allowed to spend money, and be made love to by princes, and wear smart frocks, and push themselves into smart society; and he had this *rara avis*, this abnormal, unnatural, incredible phenomenon to whom all these things, which were the very salt of life to other women, were only as dust and ashes!

What punishment could he give her? What other threats could he make her? It was useless to threaten with being turned out of doors a person who asked nothing better than to be set free to work for her livelihood. If he had hinted at such a punishment, she would have taken him at his word, would have put on her simplest gown, and would have gone to the nearest railway-station.

He thundered at her; he hurled at her blasphemous words, which had used to make the blood of miners and navvies turn cold when the "bull-dozing boss" used such to them; he swore by all heavenly and infernal powers that he would drag her on her knees to the offended gentleman. But he made no impression whatever on her. She ceased to reply. But she gave no sign of any emotion, either timorous or repentant; she was altogether unmoved. Say what he would he could not intimidate her, and the force of his fury spent itself in time, beaten by passive resistance.

The upshot of the stormy scene was, that he exiled her from his world by allowing her to accept an invitation to pass a year in India with some school friends, who were daughters of a nobleman who had recently accepted the governorship of one of the presidencies in India.

The decision cost her mother many tears, but it was the mildest ultimatum to which William Massarene could be brought. He only saw in his daughter a person who might have secured to him the one supreme honor for which his soul pined, and who had not done so, out of some squeamish, insolent, democratic, intolerable self-assertion. In sending her to pass a year in the family of Lord Framlingham, he not only removed her from his own sight, but placed her where he not unnaturally supposed that she would be surrounded by Conservative and aristocratic influences. Framlingham, however, though it had

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suited his pocket to accept his appointment, was a revolutionary at heart, and railed incessantly at the existence of his own order and his own privileges. He had heard of the discomfiture of the great personage, and chuckled over it, and welcomed the heroine of that rebuff with great cordiality to his marble palace, looking through the golden stems of palm-groves on to the Indian Ocean, where he was a funny incongruous figure himself, in his checked tweed clothes, with his red English face, his shining bald head, his eye-glass screwed into his left eye, and his clean-shaven lips shut close on a big cigar.

"Did so right, Miss Massarene, did so right," he said warmly to her, soon after her arrival. "Mustn't say so, you know, as I'm one of Her Majesty's servants, but I'm always deuced glad when any royalty gets a facer. Those people, you know, are like preserved meats in a tin case which has had all the air pumped out of it. They never get a chance of hearing the truth, nor of knowing what they look like to people who aren't snobs. Almost everybody is a snob, you see. I should like to write a new 'Book of Snobs.' The species has grown a good deal since Thackeray's days. It has developed like orchids or prize vegetables."

Framlingham, although an unpoetic-looking occupant of a marble palace in rose-gardens of the gorgeous East, was a person of delicate perceptions, high intelligence, and cultured mind. He took a great liking to this young woman, who quarreled with a lot which all the world envied her, and he pressed her to remain with his family when the year had passed; and she obtained permission to do so. Her mother was yearning for her return, but her father would willingly never have seen her face again. He was not a man who forgave.

She was thinking of the scene with her father as she sat on the marble steps in the governor's gardens, in the deep shade of a magnolia grove, absently listening to the chatter of the monkeys overhead. She felt that she had been in the right. She burned with shame whenever she remembered the eyes of the great gentleman luring upon her as he said, "I'll dine with your father, if *you* ask me."

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And her father had not seen the meaning in those words; or had seen it, but would willingly have purchased the honor even at that price!

She felt as if she could never go back to that life in England, at Monte Carlo, at Homburg. If only they would allow her to make her own career here in this ancient and romantic land as a teacher, as a nurse, as an artist, as anything. If only they would not oblige her to return to the yoke of that inane humiliating tedious routine which they thought honor and the world called pleasure!

She had by that day's mail received from her mother some cuttings from a society journal, descriptive of the glories of Harrenden House and Vale Royal, and containing an account of the dinner-party which the Grand Duchess had ordered and honored. These brilliant paragraphs had filled her with pain and disgust.

"We are getting on fast, my dear child," wrote her mother, "and it's time as you came back, for people are always asking after you, and I'd like to see you well married, and I'm sure you look more of a lady than many of them."

She knew very well what kind of marriage she would alone be allowed to make; marriage which would give her some high place in return for an abyss of debt filled up, which would purchase for her entry into some great family who would receive her for sake of what she would bring to clear off mortgages, and save the sale of timber, and enable some titled fool to go on keeping his racing-stud.

"Never! never!" she said to herself; her father might disinherit her if he pleased, but he should never make her marry so.

The same temper was in her which had made her say as a small child: "If you grin when I speak I'll hit yer." The temper was softened by courtesy, by culture, by self-control, by polished habit; but it was there, proud, imperious and indomitable.

L'échine souple of the snob and the courtier was wanting in her. "You might have swallowed your ancestor's sword," said one of her girl playmates once to her; and

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she thought bitterly, "My father's 'shooting-irons' are the only substitute for ancestral steel that I know!"

But yet she bore herself as though she had all the barons of Runnymede behind her; and she could not bend or cringe. "I don't know how the devil she comes by it, but she is certainly thoroughbred," thought her host. "Who knows what grace of Geraldines, or strength of Hamiltons, or charm of Sheridans, may have filtered into the veins of some ancestor of hers in the long, long ago?"

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CHAPTER XII.

In the March and early April of the next year there was very bad weather in England: snow, sleet and storm, killing sheep, starving cattle, delaying railway-trains, and covering much in the woodland nooks where the primrose roots were getting ready their buds for sacrifice at Westminster in the drollest form of hero-worship which a generation bereft of any sense of humor ever invented.

The moors were vast unbroken plains of virginal whiteness, and the woods looked black against a steely sky as Hurstmanceaux got into the express which had been signalled by telegram to stop for him at the little station outside the park of a country house at which he had been staying in the North Riding. The engine snorted, hissed and flung up steam and fire into the chilly air as he hastened across the platform.

He got quickly into the carriage indicated to him by his servant, pushing his dog before him, and the train had moved off before he saw that there was a lady in the compartment, to whom he lifted his Glengarry cap with a word of apology for the presence of his collie.

"I am very fond of dogs," said the lady with a smile, and the collie smelt the hem of her gown and the fur of her cloak with approval.

"Thanks!" said his master, and, as he looked at her, thought how "well-groomed," in his own vernacular, she was. She did not belong to the county he felt sure. He had never seen her before, and he knew all the Ridings well.

She was plainly dressed in dark cloth; but the sables lining her cloak were of the finest; her gloves were of perfect fit and texture; her buttoned velvet boots were admirably made; she had a little velvet toque on a shapely head; she had an air of great distinction and simplicity combined.

She resumed the perusal of her book, and he unfolded

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a morning paper. The train swung on its way at great speed. The dog, Ossian, lay down in the middle of the carriage. The glass of the windows was silvered with hoar-frost; nothing was to be seen out of them of the country through which they were being hurried. The snow fell continually; there was no wind.

Ossian, waking out of his nap and yawning, much bored, began the conversation by laying his muzzle on the lady's knees.

"Pray forgive him!" said his master.

"There is nothing to forgive. What a beauty he is!"

"He is as good as he looks. But perhaps he ought to apologize for being here."

"Why?"

"Well, really, I do not know why; but it is expected that a dog's owner should say so."

"Only when he writes to the *Times*," said the lady, amused. "In point of fact, it is I who am in the wrong place, for this is a smoking-carriage."

Ossian having thus broken the ice between them they continued to talk, of the weather, of the news of the day, of the book she had brought with her, of dogs in general, and of the collie in particular.

They were neither of them very talkative by temperament, or disposed to be communicative usually, but they got on very well together. He shifted his seat to the corner in front of her, and they continued to skim over a variety of subjects, harmoniously and agreeably to both, as the train glided over the frozen ground, scattering the fine white powder of the snow in front of it.

"How fast it snows!" said the lady rather anxiously, trying to rub the pane of glass nearest her clear with her handkerchief.

"Were you ever blocked up by a snowstorm?" asked Hurstmanceaux. "I have been—once in Scotland and once in Canada. It is a disagreeable experience."

"It must be, indeed. I hope there will be no chance of that to-day?"

"Oh, no; men will have kept the line clear, no doubt!"

As he spoke the train slackened its speed, moved with a jerking and dragging sound for some time, and a little

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while later stopped still with a great noise of rushing steam, and a jar which shook the carriage violently and flung Ossian against one of the doors.

The lady turned pale, but she did not move or scream; she looked a mute inquiry.

"I suppose they have failed to keep the line clear," he said, in answer to the glance. "Allow me to look out a moment."

He let down a window and leaned out of it; but the air was so dense with steam and snow that he could not see a yard before him.

"Is it an accident?" she said.

"I do not think so. I imagine we have run into a snow drift, nothing more."

The noise of the steam rushing out of the engine, and the shouts of officials calling to each other, almost drowned his voice. He took his railway-key out of his pocket and opened the door.

"I will go and see what it is, and return in a moment," he said to her, signing to Ossian to remain in the carriage, and leaving the door open.

She did not attempt to detain or to follow him.

"That is a thoroughbred woman," he said to himself.

He did return in a few minutes, and brought word that they had stuck fast in the snow. The engine-driver had slackened speed in time to avoid an accident, but they might be detained for hours; the telegraph wires were all down through the weight of the snow.

"It is extremely disagreeable, but it is not dangerous," he said to reassure her. "We shall be *quittes pour la peur*. We shall probably have time to get dreadfully keen about eating, and have nothing to eat. England is such a small place: one never thinks of 'stoking' when one travels in it."

"My poor maid!" she said anxiously. "I am afraid she must be very frightened, wherever she is."

"Can I look for her?"

"You are very kind, but how should you know her? I will get out myself."

"It may be as well to get out. You would be warmer if you stayed in the carriage, but there is the chance that

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a train may come up behind and run into ours, though men have gone down the line with lamps."

She had nothing with her except her book and a bouquet of violets. Closely followed by Ossian, he accompanied her along the line, looking into each compartment to find her maid. There were many people, both in the train and out of it, talking confusedly, suggesting this, that, and the other; the air was full of fog and snow; the engine, snorting and smoking, stood with its brazen breast pushed against the high white hillocks.

When they found the maid, a grey elderly person, she was in a panic of terror, which made her perfectly useless. She was shaking from head to foot, and repeating disconnected Scriptural texts; she resisted all her mistress's requests and entreaties to her to descend; she said she wished to meet her God where she was.

"If there be any thieves in the train," said Hurstmanceaux to the lady, "they will have an easy time with your jewel-box."

"I do not wear jewels," said his fellow-traveler curtly.

He looked at her in some surprise. Her tone had asperity in it.

"Were you going up to town, may I ask?" he ventured to inquire.

"No," she answered. "Only from one country house to another."

He wished he knew what country houses they were, but he could not ask that.

She argued with her maid very patiently and with great kindness, but made no impression.

"Poor Danvers! She is out of her mind with fear. What shall I do?" she said, appealing to him as though they had been old acquaintances.

"Are you afraid of a long walk?"

"No."

"Will you come with me, then? I know the country. The nearest town is four miles away. I am going there to send help. Will you like to come?"

She did not immediately reply.

"May I present myself?" he added. "I am Lord Hurstmanceaux."

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She looked up quickly.

"Indeed? You are very like your sister."

"Which one? I have several."

"Lady Kenilworth."

He laughed.

"That is a great compliment. She is the beauty of the family. Do you know her? She is one of the beauties of England."

"Not I; but my people do. I have seen her, of course!"

The tone was rather repellant; by no means cordial.

"Well, we must not lose daylight," said Ronald. "Will you come? The snow is firm, and it will be fair cross-country walking. You will be less chilled than staying here in inaction; and it is not more than four miles to the town by short cuts which I know."

She hesitated.

"But my poor woman? To leave her here alone——"

"I will tell my servant to stay and look after her. She will join you in the town, and you will continue your journey. I think you had better come with me. I must go myself, anyhow, for no one else knows the country. I have hunted and ridden over it scores of times, and I know every bush and briar."

"I will come," she said, without any further hesitation.

"You are a good walker?" he said a little anxiously.

She laughed a little.

"Oh, yes; I shall not break down and cast my shoes."

"Come along, then. It soon grows dark in these early spring days. Our Aprils are considerably worse than our Novembers."

"He is rather too familiar," she thought; but she perceived that it was his natural manner, which, when he was not irritated, or sarcastic, or—as he frequently was—silent, had great frankness and simplicity in it.

"It is an odd thing to do," she continued to say to herself, "to walk across country in the snow with a man one does not know. But he is certainly Lord Hurstmanceaux by his resemblance to his sister, and it will be better to walk than to sit still in a railway-carriage, with the chance of being frozen into bronchitis or smashed by an express train."

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And she took her way across the bleak, blank pastures which stretched around the scene of the accident, with little frozen brooks and ditches and sunken fences dividing them, and no trees or hedges to relieve the tedium of the level landscape, since scientific agriculture ruled supreme.

"How well she carries herself," thought Hurstmanceaux. "Who can she be possibly, that I do not know her by sight? And her people know Mouse and not me!"

The snow was hard, and afforded good footing. She crossed the ditches and little streams as easily and with as much elasticity as Ossian did, and went on her way quickly and with energy, carrying her bouquet of violets close up to her mouth to keep out the biting wind.

She asked him the name of the town to which they were going, and if they would be able to telegraph thence.

"I fear the wires will be damaged there, too," he answered. "It is called Greater Thorpe. There is Lesser Thorpe, St. Mary's Thorpe, Monk's Thorpe, Dane's Thorpe —the two latter charming names suggestive of the past. You would see the spire of Greater Thorpe from here if it were a clear day, or what does duty in England as a clear day."

"One's greatest want in England is distance," she answered. "I was in India a little while ago. What an atmosphere! It is heaven only to live in it."

"Yes, the light is wonderful."

"So golden and so pure. To think that the English dare to defile it with factory smoke!"

"That is on a piece with all we do there."

"How vulgar, how fussy, how common the conquerors look beside the conquered! Go into a bank, a counting-house, a police-station, and see the calm, stately, proud, reposeful natives in their flowing robes, bullied and sworn at by some smug, sandy-haired, snub-nosed official in a checked suit and a pot hat! One wishes for a second and successful mutiny."

"It must be admitted we are neither pliant nor picturesque. The Russians, when they succeed us, will at least 'compose' better. In what part of India were you?"

She told him, adding, "I have left with extreme regret."

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"You were in the Framlingham's Presidency; did you know them?"

"I was on a visit to them."

"If she would only say who she is!" thought Ronald, as a gust of wind blew them apart and sent the snow spray into their faces; he felt sure that she belonged to his world and that she was married; she had a composure of tone and manner which made her seem much older than her features looked. He was lost in admiration of the beauty of her feet as the wind lifted her skirts, or as she lifted herself over the ditches in a spring as easy as the dog's.

"You enjoy this rough walk," he said shortly to her.

"I think I do," she answered. "But I should enjoy it more if I were sure I could telegraph from this Greater Thorpe."

"You wish to reassure your people?"

"I do."

"If she would only say who they are!" he thought, but she did not.

They could only converse when the wind lulled, which was not very often; it blew straight in their faces over the bare level land, and he had some trouble in recognizing the landmarks in the white obliteration of the always featureless landscape, and in avoiding the barbed wire fencing which had many a day cost him many an angry oath as he had hunted over those pastures.

"I used to be a good deal in this country," he said, as they at last left the wide level fields for a high road, and which was less exposed to the wind. "I used to hunt with the Vale of Thorpe hounds. I do not hunt anywhere now; and I have nothing now to bring me into the county since my cousin, Lord Roxhall, sold his place."

"Vale Royal?"

"Yes? Do you know it?"

"I have seen it."

"A fine old place, the biggest beeches in England, and a herd of wild cattle equal to the Chillingham. I only wish one of the red bulls would gore the wretched cad who has bought it, or perhaps in strict justice the bulls ought first to have gored Roxhall."

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She did not reply; she was walking as easily and quickly as ever, though it was the fourth mile, and the cold of the bleak sunless day grew more intense as the hours wore away.

"Vale Royal was given by Henry the Second to the Roxhalls of that time," he continued. "My cousin wanted money, it is true; but not so desperately that he need have done so vile a thing. He was led into it. The man who has bought it is a brute from the Northwestern States; made his fortune in all kinds of foul ways, drinking-shops, gambling-saloons, cattle-trading, opium-dealing, cheating poor devils who landed with a little money and went to him for advice and concessions; an unspeakable rascal, who after thirty years' infamy out there pulls himself together, praises God for all His mercies, and comes back to this country to go to church, sit in Parliament, wear a tall hat, and buy English society and English estates. Don't you agree with me that it is utterly disgraceful?"

She held her violets higher up to her face so that he saw nothing but her eyes, which were looking down the long straight white road which stretched out before them into a grey haze of fogs.

"I quite agree with you," she said in very clear and incisive tones. "I think it utterly disgraceful. But the disgrace is as much to the bought as the buyer."

"Certainly," said Hurstmanceaux with great warmth. "A society is utterly rotten and ruined when such a fungus as this can take root in it. That I have always maintained. 'Tell me whom you know and I will tell you what you are,' is as true when said of society as when it is said of an individual. Certainly society only knows this man, this Massarene, in a perfunctory supercilious way, and only gives him the kind of nod which is the equivalent of a kick; but it does know him; it drinks his wines and eats his dinners; it nods to him, it elects him, it leaves cards on him; it lets him look ridiculous in white breeches and a gilded coat at St. James's, and it makes him pay through the nose for all its amiabilities and tolerations. It is an infamy!"

She looked straight before her down the road and did not reply.

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"You said you agreed with me?" said Hurstmanceaux, surprised at her silence.

"I agree with you entirely."

But there was a chillness in her tone which suggested to him that, however completely she shared his opinions, the subject was disagreeable to her.

"She can't belong to that class herself, she is thoroughbred down to the ground," he thought, as he said aloud, "I am afraid you are tired. The cold is beginning to tell on you."

"No; I am not at all cold," she answered, holding up nearer to her the poor violets shrivelling in the frost.

"What has come over her, I wonder," he said to himself. "She was so frank and natural and pleasant, and now she is chilly and stiff, and scarcely opens her lips. It is since I spoke of Vale Royal. But she said she agreed with me. Perhaps she knows Gerald, and is fond of him. But he could hardly know anybody intimately whom I have never seen, or never heard of, at the least."

"Yet there is this to be said. You blame this person," she added in a low but clear tone as she walked on, looking straight before her. "You admit that your world is more contemptible than he. What obliged Lord Roxhall to live in such a manner that he was forced to sell his old estate? Are not nearly all of you tradesmen and horse dealers and speculators? Who fill the markets with game, the wharfs with coal, the shows with fat cattle and brood-mares? Who breed herds of Shetland ponies to sell them to the cruel work of the mines? Who destroy all the wild-bird life of three kingdoms, that the slaughter of the battues may be wholesale and the pheasants sent in thousands to Leadenhall? Your own order, your own order. What has it done, what does it ever do, to make it so superior to the man from Dakota?"

Hurstmanceaux listened in extreme astonishment. He could not understand the scorn and suppressed vehemence with which her words vibrated. He was silent because, in his own mind, he found the indictment a just one. But his aristocratic temper was in conflict with his intellectual judgment.

"What have the English aristocracy brought into

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fashion? What do they uphold by example and precept?" she continued. "Their life is one course of reckless folly; the summer is wasted in crowded London houses, varied by race-meetings and pigeon-shooting; the autumn and winter are spent in the incessant slaughtering of birds and beasts; their beautiful country houses are only visited at intervals, when they are as crowded as a booth at a fair. What kind of example do they set to 'the man from Dakota'? What do they suggest to him of self-denial, of culture, of true grace and courtesy, of contempt for ill-gotten riches? They crowd around him as poultry around a feeding-pan! The whole thing is discreditable. But perhaps the most shameful part in it is not his!"

Hurstmanceaux was silent. He thought of Cocky and his sister, and he felt his blood tingle under the lash of her stinging words.

"My own withers are unwrung," he said at last with a smile. "I don't do those things. My estates are extremely unproductive, and I live, for the chief part of the year, on one of them—Faldon."

"It is on the sea, I think?"

"Yes; on the coast of Waterford."

"Do you cut your timber?"

"I do not."

"Do you preserve?"

"For sport? No. Wild life has a happy time of it, I assure you, with me."

"I am glad to hear any Englishman say so."

"Are we such a set of barbarians?"

"Yes, you are very barbarous; much more so than the Hindoos whom you have conquered. Compare the simplicity of their diet, the purity of their arts, the beauty of their costume and their architecture, with a Lord Mayor's feast, a Royal Academy show, a Manchester Canal, a Forth Bridge, a team of cyclists, a London woman's gown! Barbarians!—barbarians indeed, worse than any Goth or Vandal!—the nation which destroyed Delhi!"

"She must surely be a Russian," thought Hurstmanceaux. "They often speak English with an admirable fluency. But why, if so, should Vale Royal affect her so singularly?"

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He was not impressionable in these ways; but his new acquaintance attracted him extremely. He admired her, and her voice charmed him like music.

At that moment Ossian, perceiving in a distant field some sheep feeding on swedes in the snow, could not resist his hereditary instinct of shepherding them, and caused his master some trouble, as the sheep entirely mistook the collie's good intentions and fled away in all directions. The lady watched the scene, standing still under a pollarded willow. When order was restored and they walked on again, she asked him what had made him give up hunting; in herself she regretted her late eloquence, and wished her companion to forget it.

"What made you give up hunting?" she asked suddenly, as if conscious that the severity of her tone might appear strange to him.

"Well, I have never told anybody," he answered, and paused.

Then he went on, in a rather embarrassed manner, nerved by the confidence which his unknown companion roused in him:

"I was one day in my own woods at Faldon sketching; hounds were out, but I was not with them. I was sitting in the bracken quite hidden by it, and an old dog-fox slouched by me; his tail drooped, he was dead beat, he could scarcely drag himself along; he had a bad gash in his side from a stake or something; he went up to an old hollow oak, and out of it came his bitch and three little cubs; and they welcomed him, I assure you, just as his family might welcome a man going home after a hard campaign, and the bitch fell to licking the gash in his side, and the cubs frolicked around her. I never had the heart to hurt a fox again. Hares I never did hunt; it is barbarous work. But that fox, too, set me thinking. He cared for his home and his wife just like any good citizen going home in the tram to Peckham Rise or Brixton. It was a pretty sight that poor thing going home. I stopped there till dark to make sure the pack didn't come after him."

"You did very right," she said in her soft grave voice. "I wish more men would pause and think like that."

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The wind rose and blew some more fine snow powder over them and in their faces.

"It is half-past two o'clock," he said, looking at his watch, "I am sure you must miss your luncheon."

"I should like a cup of tea," she answered. "How much farther is it to Thorpe?"

"About three-quarters of a mile. We shall get there before dark. But I fear the Thorpe tea will not be up to your standard. However, they will give you a good fire at the Bell Inn."

"The Bell Inn! It sounds like Charles Dickens and Washington Irving."

"Yes; but there is no longer the abundance and the comfort of the old coaching-days; country inns, now, like most other things, hardly pay their own expenses."

"I am afraid I prefer the wayside station on the edge of the Indian jungle, with ripe bananas brought to me on a cocoa-nut leaf, and the monkeys looking down for a share from the reed roofs."

"So do I," he said, thinking that she looked pale and fatigued. "But for our sins we are in Woldshire, and we shall have to put up with coal fires and beefsteaks."

She looked alarmed.

"Surely I shall not have to stay there?"

"That will depend on what state the roads and the lines are in; the snow is less thick about here. Where are you going to? Of course, horses cannot stir out in this frost."

She avoided the direct question.

"Oh, well, it is an adventure; one must not complain. If I can get my poor woman to the town I will support its indifferent accommodation."

"We will do the best we can, but the Thorpe mind is slow and uninventive. The rural brain in England is apt to be clogged with beer. Fortunately, however, whatever be its density, it always retains its perception of the value of shillings and sovereigns. We will try that gentle stimulant so appreciated in politics, so especially appreciated since bribery was made a crime."

They had now come near enough to the town to perceive in the haze the square shoulders of its roofs and the

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tower of its famous church, all blurred and blotted by the fog like a too-much-washed water-color drawing. She did not seem to be tired, but she had lost her elasticity of movement; her eyes looked straight ahead, and no longer turned to meet his own frankly as they had done before. She seemed to wish to be silent, so he let the conversation drop, and walked on beside her mutely, as the straggling suburbs of a country town began to show themselves in the more frequent cottages, in the occasional alehouse, and in the presence of people in the roads, and in the small wayside gardens where they were scraping and sweeping clear little paths from the gates to the doors. Some of these, recognizing him, touched their hats; he spoke to the most capable-looking, told them briefly of the accident, and sent them on to the station-master, whilst he took his companion to the Bell Inn, an old house which had been a busy and prosperous place in the posting and coaching times of which he had spoken. It stood in the centre of a market-place, which was alive and noisy with country folks once a week, but was now a desolate and well-nigh empty place filled with wind and driven snow.

"If you will rest here ten minutes," he said to her, "I will come back as soon as I have seen the authorities and heard what they propose to do, and I will tell you if the lines are safe and the wires in working order. I am afraid you will find it very rough and uncomfortable, but they are lighting the fire and the landlady is a good soul; my cousins used to come and have some of her soup on hunting mornings; you will like her, I think."

He held open the door of the only sitting-room, and as she passed within bowed very low to her and went out into the street again.

As he reached the middle of the market-place he heard his name spoken, and, turning at the sound, saw her to his surprise coming toward him from the entrance of the inn. He went back a few steps to meet her. She was very pale still, and there was a pride which was almost aggressive in her attitude as she stood still on the slippery trodden stones and faced him.

"Pray do not come back to me," she said coldly. "I can have all I need here till my woman can join me. But

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there is something I ought to tell you, and I ought also to thank you for all your good nature and courtesy."

She paused a moment whilst he looked at her in silence and surprise. She was evidently speaking under the influence of some strong and personal feeling.

"It is to Vale Royal that I am going," she added with a visible effort. "I am Katherine Massarene."

The blood leapt up into Hurstmanceaux's face; he was dumb with amazement and regret; he forgot utterly that he was standing bareheaded in a snowy sloppy market-place with a dozen yokels staring and grinning about the gates of the inn yard. He drew a very long breath. "I beg your pardon," he said gravely and with great humility. "I am shocked——"

"You have no need to be so," she replied, "I quite agreed with your views. But I cannot alter my father, nor you your world."

She stroked the uplifted head of Ossian and turned to go back to the door of the Bell Inn. He strode after her and reached her side.

"I am extremely sorry," he murmured. "I am shocked at my gross indiscretion. I cannot look for your forgiveness. But pray do let me beg of you to take off those pretty velvet boots at once, and let the woman rub your feet with spirits of some sort, failing eau de Cologne. I wish I had thought to take your dressing-bag from your woman."

"Thanks."

She looked at him a moment as she said the word, and he thought there were tears in her large serious eyes. Then she went inside the old posting-house and he saw her no more.

"That cad's daughter, heavens and earth!" he said to himself as he brushed the men aside and hastened across the market-place.

He scarcely knew what he said to the frightened station-master and the obsequious mayor, and the bustling town clerk, and all the good people who crowded to welcome a live lord and hear of a railway accident. He was intensely surprised, disproportionately irritated, and sincerely vexed with himself for having spoken so incau-

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tiously. He knew that every one of his words must have cut like a knife into the sensitive nerves of this woman whom he had admired and who had looked to him so thoroughbred.

He had felt more attracted to her than he had ever felt to any stranger, and to receive this shock of disillusion left him colder than he had been all day in the mists and the snow.

Suddenly it flashed across his memory that she must be the heiress whom Mouse had desired him to marry. Suspicion awoke in him.

He had not known her but it was very possible she had known him when he had entered the railway carriage; she had spoken of his likeness to his sister. Her avoidance of any hint as to who she was or whither she was going appeared to him to suggest design. Why had she not disclosed her name until the very last moment? Though a poor man, for his rank, he had been a great deal run after by women on account of his physical beauty, and he was wary and suspicious where women were in question. She had caught him off his guard and he repented it.

If she were in truth William Massarene's daughter she probably knew the share which his sister had so largely taken in the sales of Vale Royal and Blair Airon; and in the persuasion of society to accept the purchasers. He did not know the details of his sister's diplomacy, but he guessed enough of them for him to burn with shame at the mere conjecture. When his own kith and kin were foremost in this disgraceful traffic what could his own condemnation of it look like—hypocrisy, affectation, subterfuge?

What had possessed him to talk of such subjects on a public road to a stranger. He never by any chance "gave himself away." Why had he done so this day merely because he had felt as if he had known for years a woman who had beautiful feet in fur-rimmed boots and a big bouquet of violets?

He was furious at his own folly, and he had told her that story of the fox too, which he had buried so closely in his own breast as men like him do secrete all their best

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impulses and emotions of which they are more ashamed than of any of their sins and vices! He had never been so incensed and troubled about a trifle in his whole life; and all the high breeding in him made him feel the keenest regret to have so cruelly mortified a woman about her own father and her own position.

To a gentleman the knowledge that he has insulted a person who cannot punish him for it is a very dreadful thing.

He had said no more than he meant, no more than he felt, and nothing which he would have retracted; but he was extremely sorry that he had said it to the daughter of the man Massarene. To the man himself he would have had the greatest pleasure in saying it.

"What was I about to walk across country with a stranger and talk so indiscreetly to her?" he asked himself in self-reproach as sincere as it was useless.

She asked herself the same question as she dried her snow-wet clothes before the fire of the Bell Inn, and offered all the notes and gold in her purse to have an old post-chaise got ready at once, and the shoes of two horses roughed.

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CHAPTER XIII.

WHEN she reached Vale Royal, which she did late that night, after a dreary and dangerous drive of fourteen miles, at a walking pace, over frozen roads, she told her parents of the detention of the train by the snow-drift, but she did not tell them of her meeting with Lady Kenilworth's brother.

She was tired and chilled, and went at once to a hot bath and her bed, whither her mother brought her a cup of boiling milk with two spoonsful of Cognac in it.

"It ought by rights to be milked on to the brandy," said that good lady. "But that can't be done here, though there are half a score of beautiful Alderneys standing on the Home farm only just to supply the house—and such a dairy, my dear! Chiny the walls is, and marble the floors. Only I don't hold with their method of churning, and the wenches are much too fine. I showed 'em how to turn out butter one day, and I heard 'em say as I come away that my proper place was the kitchen! Well, good-night, my dearie; sleep well."

"Good-night, dear mother," said Katherine with unusual tenderness, for she was not demonstrative, and her parents to her were almost strangers.

"It is not her fault," she thought, "if we are upstarts and interlopers in this place which Henry the Second gave the Roxhalls."

Then her great fatigue conquered her and, the brandied milk aiding, she fell sound asleep and slept dreamlessly until the chimes of the clock tower sounded eleven in the still, sunny, frosty, noonday air.

Then she awoke with the sense of something odiously painful having happened, and, as she saw the withered bouquet of violets, which she had told her maid to leave, with her gloves and her muff on a table near, she remembered, and the words of Hurstmanceaux came back on her mind with poignant mortification in their memories.

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"How right he was! Oh, how right he was! But how merciless!" she thought, as she looked through the panes of the oriel window of her chamber out on to the white and silent park. She saw the huge old oaks, the grand old views, the distant mere frozen over, the deer crossing the snow in the distance to be fed. The bells of a church unseen were chiming musically. In the ivy beneath her windows two robins were singing in friendly rivalry. Above-head was a pale soft sky of faintest blue. In the air there was frost. It was all charming, homelike, stately, simple; it would have delighted her if—if—if—there was so many "ifs" she felt sick and weary at the mere thought of them, and the innocent tranquillity of the scene jarred on all her nerves with pain.

It was late in the morning before she could summon strength to go downstairs, where she found her mother lunching alone in the Tudor dining-hall; her father had gone away early in a sledge to attend political meetings in an adjacent county, and the large house party invited was not due for two weeks.

"Who are coming, mother?" she asked.

"Oh, my dear, I never know; I scarce know who they are when I see 'em," replied the present mistress of Vale Royal. "Lady Kenilworth has arranged it all. She brings her friends."

Katherine colored at the name.

"As she would go to the Hotel de Paris at Monte Carlo, or the Sanatorium at Hot Springs!" she said bitterly.

"Well, I don't know about that. She'd have to pay for 'em in those places," said Mrs. Massarene seriously, not intending any sarcasm.

"Don't you eat nothing, my dear?" asked her mother anxiously. "I can't say as India have made you fat, Kathleen."

She smiled involuntarily.

"Surely you do not wish me to be fat, mother?"

"Well, no, not exactly. But I'd like to see you enjoy your food."

"Did she go through the form of showing you her list?"

"No, my dear, she didn't. Your father knows who is coming. I did say to her as how I wished she'd bring her

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children—they are such little ducks—but she gave a little scoffing laugh and didn't even reply."

"How can you tolerate her! You should turn her out of the house!"

"Oh, my dear Kathleen," said Mrs. Massarene in an awed tone. "We've owed everything to her. If it hadn't been for her I believe we shouldn't have known a soul worth speaking of to this day. That old Khris (though he's a real prince) is somehow down on his luck and can't get anybody anywhere. You've made fine friends, to be sure, but they didn't cotton to us; and your Lady Mary—whom you've just come from—they say, isn't what she should be."

"Is Lady Kenilworth?"

"Lord, she must be, my dear! Why she comes on here from Sandringham! She's at the very tiptop of the tree. She stays at Windsor and she sits next the Queen at the Braemar gathering. What more could you have? And though she does bite my nose off and treat me like dirt I can't help being took by her; there's something about her carries you off your feet like; I don't know what to call it."

"Fascination."

"Well, yes; I suppose you'd say so. It's a kind of power in her, and grace and beauty and cruelty all mixed up in her, as 'tis in a pretty young cat. Your father's that wrapped up in her he sits staring like an owl when she's in the room, and I believe if she told him to hop on one leg round the Houses of Parliament he'd do it to please her."

"Does he not see how ridiculous she makes him?"

"My dear," said Mrs. Massarene with solemnity, "a man never thinks he is ridiculous. He says to himself, 'I'm a *man*,' and he gets a queer sort of comfort out of that as a baby does out of sucking its thumb."

Katherine smiled absently.

"Does Lady Kenilworth ever speak of her brother—her eldest brother, Lord Hurstmanceaux?" she said in an embarrassed tone, which her mother did not observe.

"Yes; she says he's a bear. She's brought her brothers-in-law, and a good many of her relations, her 'people,' as she calls 'em, but her own brothers, none of 'em, ever."

"This place belonged to her cousin."

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"Did it? I never knew anything about it. William came in one day and said: 'I've bought a place in the shires. Go down there this afternoon.' That was all. I was struck all of a heap when I saw it. And the housekeeper, who had stayed on to go over the inventory, drew herself up when she met me, stiff as stiff, and said to me, 'I shall be glad if you will release me of my charge, madam. I have always lived with gentlefolks.' Those were her very words, Kathleen. A fine set-up, glum-looking woman she was, dressed in black watered silk, and she went off the next morning, though we had offered her double her price to remain under us. That's just, you know, what Grigson, the courier, said once; or rather, *he* said he wouldn't live with gentlefolks because they was always out o' pocket."

Katherine moved restlessly: words rose to her lips which she repressed.

"And when I go in the village," continued her mother, "there's nothing but black looks and shut doors, and the very geese on the little common screech at me. The rector's civil, of course, because he's an eye to the main chance, but he's the only one; and I'm afeard it's mostly because he wants your father to give him a peal of bells. They seem to think your father should pay the National Debt!"

Katherine sighed.

"Poor mother! *Que de couleuvres on vous fait avaler!*"

"Don't talk French, Kathleen, I can't abide it," said Mrs. Massarene with unusual acerbity. "When we first set foot in Kerosene City, a few planks on the mud as 'twas then, a little nasty Frenchman had an eating shop next ours and he undersold me in everything, and made dishes out of nothing, and such pastry—light as love! My best was lead beside it."

She continued to recall the culinary feats of her Gallic rival, whose superiority had filled her with a Gallophobia deathless and pitiless as that of Francesco Crispi; and her daughter's thoughts wandered away from her to the low-lying white fields round Greater Thrope, and to the remembrance of the dark blue eyes which had met her own so frankly through the misty air.

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"Would you mind very much, mother," she said at length, "if I did not appear while these people are here? I could go to Lady Mary's or to Brighton."

Mrs. Massarene was startled and alarmed.

"Oh, my dearie, no! Not on any account. Your father would never forgive it. You have been so much away; it has angered him so. And as for your views and your reasons he'd never see them, my dear, no more than a blind man can see a church clock. Pray don't dream of it, child. People say it is so odd you went to India. They will think you have some skin-disease, or are light in your head, unless you are seen now at home."

Katherine sighed again.

"I think you do not understand," she said in a low, grave voice. "I utterly disapprove, I utterly abhor, the course which my father takes. I think his objects contemptible and his means to attain them loathsome. If you only knew what they look to persons of breeding and honor! Society laughs at him whilst it uses him and rules him. He is not a gentleman. He never will be one. A complacent premier may get him a knightage, a baronetage, a peerage; and a sovereign as complacent may let him kiss her hand. But nothing of that will make him a gentleman. He will never be one if he lived to be a hundred or if he live to entertain emperors. I cannot alter his actions. I cannot open his eyes. I have perhaps no right to speak thus of him. But I cannot help it. I despise the whole miserable ignominious farce. I cannot bear to be forced to remain a spectator of it. This place is Lord Roxhall's. All the money in the world cannot make it ours. We are aliens and intruders. All the people whom Lady Kenilworth will bring here next week will go away to ridicule us, plebeians as we are masquerading in fine clothes and ancient houses."

"My dear! my dear!" cried her mother in great trepidation. "You make me all in a cold tremble to hear you. All you say is gospel truth, and I've felt it many a time, or like to it, myself. But it is no manner of use to say it. Your father thinks he's a great man, and nobody'll put him out of conceit of himself; it's true that as he made his pile he's the right to the spending of it.

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Don't you talk of going away, Kathleen. You are the only creature I have to look to, for I know full well that I'm only a stone in your father's path and a thorn in his flesh. I can't kill myself to pleasure him, for 't would be fire everlasting, but I know I'm no use to him now. I was of use on the other side, and he knew it then, though I can't call to mind one grateful word as ever he said to me; but he knew it, and wouldn't have got along as fast as he did without me; and nobody kept ledgers better than me, nor scrubbed a kitchen table whiter. That's neither here nor there now, however; and I'm in his way now with fine folks; and look like 'em I never shall. But you, my dear, you do look like 'em, and talk like 'em, and carry yourself like 'em. I would call you like an empress, only I saw an empress once, and she was a little old hodmedod of a woman in a Shetland shawl, and she was cheapening shells on the beach at Blankenberge; and you are grand and stately, and fine as a lily on its stalk. I want them to see what you look like, my dear; and they won't laugh at *you*, that's certain. As for the house, it's been paid for, so I don't see how you can say it's Lord Roxhall's still. He can't eat his cake and have it.

"And my dear Kathleen," she continued, changing the subject with great agitation, "they say you mustn't know Lady Mary; she, she, she isn't respectable. There is something about her boy's tutor and about a painter, a house painter, even, they say."

Katherine Massarene colored. "Dear mother, I know Lady Mary is not all she might be. She is light and foolish. But when you sent me to that Brighton school, a little frightened, stupid, miserable child, who could not even speak grammatically, Lady Mary noticed me when she came to see Enid and May (her own daughters), and told them to be kind to me, and asked me to spend the holidays with them; and they were kind, most kind, and never laughed at me, and took pains to tell me how to behave and how to speak; and I assure you, my dear mother, that Lady Mary might be the worst woman under the sun I should never admit it, and I should always be grateful to her for her goodness to me when I was friend-

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less and common and ridiculous—a little vulgar chit who called you 'Ma.'"

Mrs. Massarene was divided between wrath and emotion.

"I am sure you were a well-brought-up child from your cradle, and pretty-behaved if ever there were one," she said with offence. "And I dare say she knew as how your father'd made his pile, and had an eye on it."

"Oh no, oh no," said Katherine with warmth and scorn. "Lady Mary is not like that, nor any of her people; they are generous and careless, and never calculate; they are not like your Kenilworths and Karsteins. She is a very thoroughbred woman, and to her *novi homines* are *novi homines*, however gilded may be their stucco pedestals."

Happily the phrase was incomprehensible to her hearer, who merely replied obstinately: "Well, they tell me she's ill spoke of, and I can't have you mixed up with any as is; but if she was kind to you, my dear, and I mind me well you always wrote about her as being such, I'll do anything to help her in reason. You know, my dear," she added, lowering her voice, for the utterance was treasonable, "I have found out as how all them great folks are all hollow inside, as one may say. They live uncommon smart, and whisk about all the year round, but they're all of 'em in Queer Street, living by their wits, as one may say; now I be bound your Lady Mary is so too, because she's a duke's daughter, and her husband came into the country with King Canute, him as washed his feet in the sea—at least the book says so—and anything she'd like done in the way of money I'd be delighted to do, since she was good to you——"

"Oh, my dear mother," cried Katherine, half amused and half incensed, "pray put that sort of thing out of your mind altogether. Lady Mary has everything she wants, and if she had not she would die sooner than say so. And indeed they are quite rich. Not what my father would call so probably, but enough so for a county family which dates, as you rightly observe, from Knutt."

Mrs. Massarene sighed heavily; she was bewildered but she was obstinate.

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"Di'monds then?" she said tentatively. "None of them ever have enough di'monds. One might send her a standup thing for her head in di'monds—tira I think they call it; and say as how we are most grateful all of us, but you can't be intimate because virtue's more than rank."

Katherine rose with strong effort controlling the deep anger and the irresistible laughter which moved her.

"We will talk of these things another time, dear," she said after a moment. "Lady Mary will not be in London this season after Whitsuntide. Enid and May go out this year with their grandmother, Lady Chillingham."

"That's just what she said," cried her mother in triumph. "She said Lady Mary couldn't show her nose at Court even to present her own girls!"

"Who said so?"

"Lady Kenilworth."

"Lady Kenilworth a purist! I fear she could give my poor Lady Mary a good many points——"

"What do you mean? Lady Kenilworth knows the world."

"That no one doubts. And I dare say *she* would take the tiara, my dear mother."

"I don't understand you, and you have a very rude way of speaking."

"Forgive me, dear!" said her daughter with grace and penitence. "I do not like your guide, philosopher and friend, though she is one of the prettiest women I ever saw in my life."

"Well, you can't say *she* doesn't go to Court," cried Mrs. Massarene in triumph.

"I am quite sure she will go to Court all her life," replied Katherine Massarene—an answer on which her mother pondered darkly in silence. It must be meant for praise, it could not be meant for blame; and yet there was a tone in the speaker's voice, a way of saying this apparently acquiescent and complimentary phrase, which troubled its hearer.

"Her answer's for all the world like a pail of fine milk spoilt by the cow having ate garlic," thought Mrs. Massarene, her mind reverting to happy homely days in the

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dairy and the pastures with Blossom and Bee and Buttercup, where Courts were realms unknown.

Katherine was silent.

She felt the absolute impossibility of inducing her mother to make any stand against the way of life which to herself was so abhorrent; or even to make her comprehend the suffering it was to her finer and more sensitive nature. Her mother disliked the life because it worried her and made her feel foolish and incapable, but she could not reach any conception of the torture and degradation which it appeared to Katherine. If she had possessed any power, any influence, if she had been able to return in kind the insolence she winced under, and the patronage she so bitterly resented, things would have seemed different to her; but she could do nothing, she could only remain the passive though indignant spectator of what she abhorred.

To her the position was false, contemptible, infamous, everything which Hurstmanceaux had called it; and she was compelled to appear a voluntary sharer in and accessory to it. The house, beautiful, ancient, interesting as it was, seemed to her only a hateful prison—a prison in which she was every day set in a pillory.

All the underlings of the gardens, the stables, the Home farm, the preserves, showed the contempt which they felt for these unwelcome successors of the Roxhall family.

"One would think one had not paid a single penny for the place," said Mrs. Massarene, who, when she asked the head gardener at what rate he sold his fresias, was met by the curt reply, "We don't sell no flowers here, mum. Lord Roxhall never allowed it."

"But, my good man," said his present mistress, "Lord Roxhall's gone for ever and aye; he's naught to do with the place any more, and to keep all these miles of glass without making a profit out of them is a thing I couldn't hold with anyhow. Nobody's so much money that they can afford waste, Mr. Simpson; and what we don't want ourselves must be sold."

"That must be as you choose, mum," said the head gardener doggedly. "You'll suit yourself and I'll suit

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myself. I've lived with gentlefolk and I hain't lived with traders."

At the same moment Mr. Winter, who had of course brought down his household, was saying to the head keeper:

"Yes, it does turn one's stomach to stay with these shoeblacks. It's the social democracy, that's what it is. But the old families they're all run to seed like your Roxhall's; they expect one to put up with double-bedded rooms and African sherrys. I am one as always stands up for the aristocracy, but their cellars aren't what they were nor their tables neither. That's why they're always dining theirselves with the sweeps and the shoeblacks."

In happy ignorance that his groom of the chambers was describing him as a sweep and a shoeblack, William Massarene, with a marquis, a bishop, and a lord-lieutenant awaiting him, was driving to address a political meeting in the chief town of South Woldshire.

When he got up on his dog-cart, correctly attired in the garb and the gaiters of a squire of high degree, and drove over to quarter sessions, he felt as if he had been a justice of the peace and the master of Vale Royal all his life. He really handled horses very well; his driving was somewhat too flashy and reckless for English taste, but the animal had never been foaled which he would not have been able to break in; he who had ridden bronchos bare-backed, and raced blue grass trotters, and this power stood him in good stead in such a horsy county as Woldshire.

The snow was gone and the weather was open. There was the prospect of political changes in the air, and, in the event of a general election, his chiefs of party desired that he should represent his county instead of continuing member for that unsound and uncertain metropolitan division, which he did actually represent. To feel the way and introduce him politically in the borough before there should be any question of his being put up for it, those who were interested in the matter had got up a gathering of county notabilities on a foreign question of the moment, which was supposed, as all foreign questions always are, to involve the entire existence of England.

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He had been told what to say on these questions, and although it seemed to him "awful rot," like everything inculcated by his leaders, he said it obediently, and refreshed himself afterwards by some personal statements. Amongst men, on public matters he always showed to advantage. He was common, ignorant, absurd, very often; but he was a man, a man who could hold his own and had a head on his shoulders. That mastery of fate which had made him what he was gave meaning to his dull features, and light to his dull eyes. No one, as modern existence is constituted, could separate him altogether from the weight of his ruthless will, and the greatness of his accomplished purpose; he stood on a solid basis of acquired gold. Before a fine lady he shook in his shoes, and before a prince he trembled; but at a mass-meeting he was still the terrible, the formidable, the indomitable, "bull-dozing boss" of Kerosene City. His stout hands gripped the rail in front of him, while their veins stood out like cords, and his rough rasping voice made its way through the wintry air of England, as it had done through a blizzard on the plains of the West.

"I've been a workingman myself, gentlemen," he said, amidst vociferous cheers, "and if I'm a rich man to-day it's been by my own hand and my own head as I've become so. I've come home to die" (a voice in the crowd: "You'll live a hundred years!"), "but before I die I want to do what good I can to my country and my fellow-countrymen." (Vociferous cheers.) "Blood's thicker than water, gentlemen——"

The applause here was so deafening that he was forced to pause; this phrase never fails to raise a tempest of admiration, probably because no one can ever possibly say what it is intended to mean.

"I know the institutions of my country, gentlemen," he continued, "and I am proud to take my humble share in holding them steady through stormy weather. I have lived for over thirty years, gentlemen, in a land where the institutions are republican, and I wish to speak of that great republic with the sincere respect I feel. But a republican form of government would be wholly unfitted for Great Britain."

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"Why so?" asked a voice in the crowd.

Mr. Massarene did not feel called on to answer so indiscreet a question; he continued as though no one had spoken.

"The foundations of her greatness lie embedded in the past, and are inseparably allied with her institutions. The courage, honor and patriotism of her nobility" (the marquis with a gratified expression played with his watch-chain), "the devotion, purity, and self-sacrifice of her church" (the prelate patted the black silk band on his stomach and purred gently like a cat), "the examples of high virtue and wisdom which have adorned her throne" (the lord-lieutenant looked ecstatic and adoring, as a pilgrim of Lourdes before the shrine)—"all these, gentlemen, have made her what she is, the idol of her sons, the terror of her foes, the bulwark at once of religious faith and of religious freedom. The great glory of our country, sirs, is that poor and rich are equal before the law" ("Yah!" from a rude man below), "and that the roughest, most friendless lad may by probity and industry reach her highest honors. I myself left Queenstown, gentlemen, a young fellow with three pounds in my pocket and a change of clothes in a bundle, and that I have the honor of addressing you here to-day is due to the fact that I toiled honestly from morning till night for more than thirty years in exile. It was the hope of coming back, sirs, and settling on my native soil, which kept the heart up in me through hunger and thirst, and heat and cold, and such toil as here you know nothing about. I was a poor working lad, gentlemen, with three pounds in my pocket, and yet here I stand to-day the equal of prince and peer" (the marquis frowned, the bishop fidgetted, the lord-lieutenant coughed, but Mr. Massarene was *emballé*, and heeded not these hints of disapprobation). "What do you want with republican institutions, my friends, when under a monarchy the doors of wealth and honor open wide to the laboring man who has had sense and self-denial enough to work his way upward?" ("They open to a golden key, damn your jaw!" cried a vulgar being in the mob below.) "who by honesty and economy, and incessant toil, has come to put his legs under the same ma-

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hogany with the highest of the land. You talk of golden keys, sir—the only key to success is the key of character. Before I give my hand, sir, whether to prince or pauper, I ask—what is his character?"

"Dear me, dear me, this is very irrelevant," murmured the lord-lieutenant, much distressed.

"Damned inconvenient," murmured the marquis with a chuckle. The bishop folded his hands and looked rapt and pious. But the mayor of the borough, with desperation, plucked at the orator's coat tails.

"Order, order," he murmured with a clever adaptation of parliamentary procedure; and Mr. Massarene, whose ear was quick, and who was proud of his knowledge of the by-words of the benches, understood that he was irrelevant and on ticklish grounds, and brought forward a racy American anecdote with ready presence of mind and extreme success; whilst the crowd below roared with loud and delighted laughter. The gentlemen at his elbow breathed again. There had been, in a ducal house of the countryside, a very grave scandal a few months earlier; a scandal which had become town-talk, and even been dragged into the law courts. It would never do to have the yokels told their "character" was a patrician or political *sine qua non*.

On the whole the speech was a very popular one; the new owner of Vale Royal was welcomed. Too egotistic in places, and too unpolished in others, it was vigorous, strong, and appealed forcibly to the mob by its picture of a herdsman with three pounds in his pocket become a capitalist and a patron of princes.

To his own immediate and aristocratic supporters its effect was less inspiriting. He gave them distinctly to understand the *quid pro quo* which he gave and expected.

"If he don't get what he wants from our side he'll rat as sure as he lives," thought the lord-lieutenant; and the mayor thought to himself that it would really have been better to have left the metropolitan division its member ungrudged.

"What a fearful person," said the lord-lieutenant, a tall slender man with fair hair turning grey, and a patrician face, blank and dreary in expression, though many

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years of conflict between a great name and a narrow income.

"His speech was quite Radical. I really did not know how to sit still and hear it," whispered the bishop in a tone of awe and horror.

The marquis lighted a cigar. "Never mind that. It took with the yokels. He'll vote straight for us. He wants a peerage."

"Gladstone would give him a peerage."

"Of course. But Gladstone's peerages are like Gladstone claret—unpleasantly cheap. Besides, our man loves smart folks—the liberals are dowdy; our man loves 'proputty,' like the northern farmer, and the liberals are always nibbling into it like mice into cheese. Besides, Mouse Kenilworth's godmother to this beast; she has put him in the way he should go."

"I wish she would write his speeches for him," said the bishop.

"Took with the yokels, took with the yokels," repeated the marquis. "Ain't that what speeches are made for? People who can read don't want to be bawled at. Man will do very well, and we shall have him in the Lords; he'll call himself Lord Vale Royal, I suppose—ha! ha!—poor Roxhall!"

The lord-lieutenant, who could not accept the social earthquake with the serenity of his friend, shivered, and went to his carriage.

"I shall go and ask our candidate for some money," murmured the bishop, whose carriage was not quite ready.

The marquis grinned. "Nothing like a cleric for thinking of the main chance!" he said to himself.

The bishop hesitated a few moments, looked up at the steps of the hotel, and hastened across the market-place as rapidly as his portly paunch and tight ecclesiastical shoes permitted. Mr. Massarene was standing on the top of the step with three of his supporters. The churchman took from his pocket a roll of thick vellum-like paper, evidently a memorial or a subscription-list.

"For the rood-screen," he murmured. "A transcendent work of art. And the restoration of the chauntry. Dear

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Mr. Massarene, with your admirable principles, I am sure we may count on your support?"

William Massarene, with his gold pencil case between his thick finger and thumb, added his name to the list on the vellum-like scroll.

The lord-lieutenant was on that list for twenty guineas; Lord Roxhall for ten guineas. William Massarene wrote himself down for two hundred guineas.

"Back the Church for never forgetting to do business," said the marquis with a chuckle to himself; and he too mounted the hotel steps as his ecclesiastical friend descended them, after warmly and blandly pressing the candidate's hand and inviting him to dinner at the episcopal palace.

"Booking a front seat in heaven, Mr. Massarene?" he cried out in his good-humored contemptuous voice. "Well, come, do something for earth too. You haven't subscribed to the Thorpe Valley Hounds. Got to do it, you know. Hope you're sound about Pug."

The marquis had been master of the pack for a dozen years.

"I'm no sportsman," said his victim, who had no notion who or what Pug was. "But if it's the custom in the county——"

"Of course it's the custom of the county! Roxhall, poor fellow, was a staunch friend to us. You mustn't be otherwise. We'll draw Vale Royal coverts for cubs next October. Mind you're sound about Pug."

"May I ask what Lord Roxhall subscribed?"

"Fifty guineas," said the M. F. H. truthfully.

Mr. Massarene planted his legs a little further apart and thrust out his stomach.

"I'll give four fifties to the dogs," he said with grandeur.

"The dogs!" ejaculated the marquis; but he restrained his emotions and grasped his new subscriber's hand cordially.

"The Kennels and the Cathedral got the same measure," he thought with amusement, as he nodded good-humoredly to the crowd below and entered the hotel to get a nip of something warm.

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"Deuced clever of the Bishop; I shouldn't have thought of making the cad 'part.' What an eye the saints always have on the money-bags," he thought as he drank some rum-punch.

But, being a cheery person who took the world as he found it, he said to his wife when he got home that day: "Go and call at Vale Royal, Anne; the man's a very good fellow. No nonsense about his origin. Told us all he began life with three pounds in his pocket. Don't like going to see 'em in Roxhall's place? Oh, Lord, my dear, that's sentiment. If Roxhall hadn't sold the place they couldn't have bought it, could they?"

"But why should we know them?" said the lady, who was unwilling to accord her countenance to new people.

"Because he's promised two hundred guineas to the 'dogs,'" said the marquis with a chuckle, "and because he's a pillar of the Tory Democracy, my dear!"

"Tory Democracy? A contradiction in terms!" said the lady. "You might as well say Angelic Anarchy!"

"We shall come to that, too," said her spouse.

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CHAPTER XIV.

THE snow was gone, but it was still cold and unpleasant weather when the ruler of Mr. Massarene's fate, accompanied by a score or more intimate acquaintances who had been persuaded to patronize "Billy," arrived in the dusk at Vale Royal with an enormous amount of luggage and a regiment of body-servants and maids.

"You needn't have come to meet us. I know my way about here better than you do," was the ungracious salutation with which the host, who had gone himself to the station, was met by the object of his veneration. She never flattered him now; she had got him well in hand; it was no longer necessary to do violence to her nature; when one likes the use of the spur one does not humor one's horse with sugar; she thought the spur and the whip salutary for him, and employed them with scant mercy.

She mounted as lightly as a young cat to the box of the four-in-hand break, took the reins, and drove her mesmerized, trembling yet enchanted victim through the dusky lanes and over the muddy roads which were familiar to her, the lights of the lamps flashing, and the chatter and laughter of the other occupants of the break bringing the laboring people out of their cottages, as the lady whom they knew so well flew by them in the twilight.

"Seems kind o' heartless like in Lady Kenny to go to the great house now the poor lord's in it no more; him her own cousin and all," said a young woman to her husband who was only a hedger and ditcher, but a shrewd observer in his way, and who replied, as he looked after the four white-stockinged bays: "Lady Kenny aren't one to cry for spilt milk; she knows where her bread is buttered. Lord, gal, 'twas she made Roxhall sell, and I'll take my oath as I stands here that most o' the blunt went in her pocket."

All the people for forty miles round were of the same opinion, and owed her a grudge for it. Roxhall had been

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a very popular landlord and employer; his tenantry and laboring folks mourned for him, and despised the new man who stood on his hearthstone. Quite indifferent, however, to the *voces populi* she drove safely through the familiar gates and up the mile-long avenue as night descended, and went into the library, looking very handsome with her blue eyes almost black, and her fair face bright and rosy, from the chilly high winds of the bleak April evening.

She pulled off her sealskins and threw them to one of her attendant gentlemen, and then walked forward to the warmth of the great Elizabethan fireplace. "Well, my dear woman, how do you like it?" she said good-humoredly to Margaret Massarene, as she drew off her gloves and took a cup of tea before the hearth where a stately fire was burning for its beauty's sake: the great room was heated by hot water pipes. Margaret Messarene was in that dual state of trepidation, anxiety, offence, and bewilderment into which the notice of her monitress invariably plunged her. She murmured some inarticulate words, and glanced timidly at the bevy of strangers. But Mouse did not take the trouble to introduce her friends to their hostess; some of them were already acquainted with her, but some were not: all with equal and unceremonious readiness ignored her presence, and descended on the tea-cups and muffins and caviare sandwiches with the unanimity of a flock of rooks settling down on to a field mined with wire worms.

"Always had tea in here in Gerald's time," said one of the men, staring about him to see if there was any alteration made in the room.

"I don't think you know my daughter," Mrs. Massasene summed courage to murmur, with a nervous glance toward Katherine, who stood at the other end of the wide chimney-piece, a noble piece of fine oak carving with huge silver dogs of the Stuart period, and the Roxhall arms in bold bosses above it.

Mouse, looking extremely like her brother, flashed her sapphire eyes like a search light over the face and figure of the person in whom she had by instinct divined an antagonist, and desired to find a sister-in-law.

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"So glad," she murmured vaguely, as she put down her cup, and held out her hand with a composite grace all her own, at once charmingly amiable and intolerably insolent.

Katherine merely made her a low curtsey, and did not put out her hand in return.

"How's Sherry and Bitters?" asked Lady Kenilworth, marking but ignoring the rudeness. "Amusing creature, isn't he? Bored to death, I suppose, in India?"

"It would be difficult, I think, for the most stupid person to be bored in India," replied Katherine briefly. "Lord Framlingham is not stupid."

Lady Kenilworth stared. Then she laughed, as it was so very comical to find Billy's daughter such a person as this.

"I saw from that bust of Dalou's that she wouldn't be *facile*," she reflected. "Looks as if she thought pumpkins of herself; if she's cheeky to me it will be the worse for her."

Katherine was very cold, very pale, very still; the men did not get on with her, and soon abandoned the attempt to do so. The ladies, after staring hard, scarcely noticed her or her mother, but chattered amongst themselves like sparrows on a house roof after rain. With swelling heart she felt their gaze fixed on her; two of them put up their eyeglasses. She wore a plain silver-colored woolen gown, but their experienced eye recognized the cut of a famous *faiseur*, and the natural lines of her form were unusually perfect.

"*Très bien mise; très simple, mais très bien*," said a Parisienne, Duchesse de Saint-Avit, quite audibly, gazing at her as if she were some curious piece of carving like the fireplace.

"*Elle n'est pas mal du tout*," returned a foreign diplomatist quite audibly also, as though he were in the stalls of a theatre.

"Sullen, is she?" thought Mouse, toasting one of her pretty feet on the fender. "Gives herself airs, does she? That's old Fram's doing, I expect."

Ignoring her as an unknown quantity, to be seen to at leisure and annihilated if needful, she turned to her host, who was standing awkwardly behind the brilliant throng.

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"Got my telegram about the Bird rooms?" she said sharply. She would have spoken more civilly to an hotel-keeper.

The Bird rooms were a set of three rooms, bed, dressing, and sitting-room; their walls painted with birds and flowers on a pale-blue ground, their silk hangings and furniture of corresponding color and design; and many birds in Chelsea and Battersea, majolica, terra de pipa, and other china and pottery, on the tables and cabinets. She did not care a straw about the birds; but they were the warmest, cosiest rooms in the house facing full south, and were detached from observation in a manner which was agreeable and convenient; and she had sent a brief dispatch that morning to command their reservation for herself. Country houses are always selected with regard to their conveniences for innocent and unobserved intercourse.

The Bird rooms were duly assigned to her, and Mr. Massarene himself had walked through them that morning to make sure that they were thoroughly warmed, that the writing table was properly furnished, and that the rarest flowers had been gathered for the vases on the table; he with eagerness assured her that her word had been law.

"I hope you haven't altered anything *there?*" she said, taking up her gloves. "It's very absurd, you know, to put Turkish screens and lamps in an old Tudor room like this. They've smartened the place up," she said to her friends, looking about her. "That open work cedar wood screen wasn't across that door in Gerald's time, nor those great bronze lamps hanging over there. Where'd you get them, Billy? They look like Santa Sophia."

But she did not listen to Billy's reply. She was looking at the mulberry-colored velvet curtains which replaced in the windows the somewhat shabby and frayed hangings of her cousin's reign.

"I wish I had come here last year," she said to her discomfited host. "You should have touched nothing. A place like this doesn't want Bond Street emptied into it. I don't know what Gerald would say. He'd be dreadfully angry."

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Mr. Massarene thought that Lord Roxhall had parted with his right to be angry; but he dared not say so. He murmured that he was sorry; whatever there might be that was not suitable should be removed.

"Can't you see how wrong it all is?" asked his tyrant impatiently.

He regretfully confessed his utter inability to see it; was grieved they were incorrect; they should be moved to-morrow.

"Lady Kenilworth is a purist," said his daughter in clear cold tones. "New people who come into old houses are of necessity eclectic."

Her father frowned. He did not know what eclectic meant, but he supposed it meant something vulgar. His guest stared: if Billy's daughter were cheeky like this it would be necessary, she thought, to take her down a peg or two. But she was forced to confess to herself that the daughter of the house did not look like a person whom it would be easy to take down, either one peg or many.

"Would you like to go to your rooms, ma'am?" murmured her hostess, when the tea had been drunk and the chatter had ceased for a minute and the sound of the first dinner-gong boomed through the house.

"My dear woman," replied Mouse, "I know the place better than you do! But, really, if I shall find Pekin mandarins on oak banisters, and Minton plaques on Tudor panels, I shall not have strength to go up the staircase!"

"What *do* she mean?" murmured Margaret Massarene.

"She means to be insolent," replied her daughter, and the reply was not in a very low tone. But Lady Kenilworth was or pretended to be out of hearing, going out of the library with two of her special friends and calling on others to come with her and see what the vandals had done: the gong was booming loudly.

William Massarene was inexpressibly mortified; the more keenly so because if he had listened to Prince Khris two years before he would not have had Bond Street and the Rue de Rivoli emptied into a beautiful, hoary, sombre, old Tudor house.

Mouse felt no qualms whatever at seeing the new people in the old house. She had been unable to understand

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why Roxhall would not himself come with her. But some people were so whimsical and faddish and sentimental. They spoiled their own lives and bothered those of others. She thought it was good fun to see William Massarene in the old Tudor dining-hall and his wife in the beautiful oval Italian drawing-room. Roxhall would not have seen the fun of it, but men are so slow to catch a joke.

"They are so deliciously ridiculous and incongruous!" she said to one of her companions.

She had brought a "rattling good lot" with her; smart women and cheery men who could ride to hounds all day and play bac' all night, or run twenty miles to see an otter-worry and be as "fresh as paint" next morning; people with blue blood in their veins, and good old names, and much personal beauty and strength, and much natural health and intelligence; but who by choice led a kind of life beside which that of an ape is intellectual and that of an amœba is useful: people who were very good-natured and horribly cruel, who could no more live without excitement than without cigarettes, who were never still unless their doctor gave them morphia, who went to Iceland for a fortnight and to Africa for a month; who never dined in their own homes except when they gave a dinner-party, who could not endure solitude for ten minutes, who went anywhere to be amused, who read nothing except telegrams, and who had only two cares in life—money and their livers.

They came down to Vale Royal to be amused, to eat well, to chatter amongst themselves as if they were on a desert island, to carry on their flirtations, their meetings, their intrigues, and to arrange the pastimes of their days and nights precisely as they pleased without the slightest reference to those who entertained them.

"What would you like to do to-morrow?" their host had ventured to say to one of them, and the guest had replied, "Oh, pray don't bother; we're going somewhere, but I forget where."

They had brought a roulette wheel with them, and cards and counters; for their leader knew by experience that the evenings without such resources were apt to be dull at Vale Royal. William Massarene, indeed, had provided

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forms of entertainment such as were unattainable by the limited means of the Roxhall family. He had caused admirable musicians, good singers, even a choice little troupe of foreign comedians, to be brought down for this famous week in which the azure eyes of his divinity smiled upon him under his own roof-tree. But there was one diversion which she considered superior in its attractions to anything which tenors and sopranos, viols and violins, or even Palais Royal players, could give her, and that diversion she took without asking the permission of anybody. There was a with-drawing-room at Vale Royal which was always known as the Italian Room because some Venetian artist, of no great fame but of much graceful talent, had painted ceiling and walls, as was proven by old entries in account books of the years 1640–50, contained in the muniment-room of the Roxhalls. On the third night after their arrival, when they were all in this Italian room, after a short performance by the Parisian comedians, a long table of ebony and ivory was unceremoniously cleared of the various objects of art which had been placed on it, and the roulette-wheel was enthroned there instead by the hands of Lady Kenilworth herself, and the little ball was set off on its momentous gyrations.

She was looking more than ever like a lovely flower, with a turquoise collar round her throat, and real forget-me-nots fastened by diamonds in her hair. For some minutes William Massarene, who had slept through the French comedy, and was still drowsy, did not become sensible of what was taking place in his drawing-room. But when the shouts and laughter of the merry gamblers reached his ear and he realized with difficulty what was taking place, a heavy frown, such as Kerosene City had learned to dread, stole on his brows, and a startled horror opened wide his eyes.

Play! Play under his roof!

All his Protestant and Puritan soul awoke. A large portion of his earliest gains had been made by the miners and navvies and cowboys who had gathered to stake their dollars in the back den of his shop in Kerosene City; and later on he had made millions by his ownership of private hells in larger towns of the United States; and the very

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thought of gambling was odious to him because he felt that these were portions of his past on which no light must ever shine. He felt that he owed it to the conscience which he had acquired with his London clothes and his English horses to prohibit all kinds of play, however innocent, in his own drawing-rooms. He crossed the room and, nervously approaching the leader of the band, ventured to murmur close to her ivory shoulder: "You never said you meant to play, Lady Kenilworth. I can't have any play—I can't indeed—in my house."

His tone was timid and imploring. He was frightened at his own temerity, and grew grey with terror as he spoke. She turned her head and transfixed him with the imperious challenge of her glance.

"What are you talking about, my good man?" she said in her clearest and unkindest tone. "It is not your house when I'm in it."

"But I can't allow play," he murmured, with a gasp. "It's against my principles."

"Don't talk rot, Billy!" she cried with impatience. "Who cares about your principles? Keep them for the hustings."

Then she turned the ivory shoulder on him again, and, amidst the vociferous laughter of the circle of players, William Massarene, feeling that he had made a fool of himself, hastily and humbly retreated.

The merriment pealed in louder ecstasy up to the beautiful painted ceiling, as she cried after the retreating figure: "You go to bed, Billy—go to bed! Or we sha'n't let you dine with us to-morrow night!"

"You're rather rough on the poor beast, Lady Kenny," said one of the players who was next her.

"Billy's like a Cairo donkey—he must feel the goad and be gagged," replied Mouse, sweeping her counters together with a rapacious grace like a hawk's circling flight.

Then the little ball ran about in its momentous gyrations, and the counters changed hands, and the game went on all the giddier, all the merrier, because "Billy thought it improper."

Katherine rose from her seat by the pianoforte and

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came to her father's side. Indignation shone in her lustrous eyes, while a flash of pain, of shame, and of anger burned on her cheeks.

"Father, oh, father!" she said in a low, intense murmur, "send them away! They insult you every hour, every moment! Why do you endure it? Turn them all out to-morrow morning!"

"Mind your own business! Do I want any lessons from you, damn you?" said Massarene, in a sullen whisper, more infuriated by her perspicuity than by the facts on which her appeal to him was based.

His daughter shrank a little, like a high spirited animal unjustly beaten—not from fear, but from wounded pride and mute disgust. She went back to the pianoforte and opened the book of "Lohengrin."

He threw himself heavily into an armchair, and took up an album of Caran d'Ache drawings and bent over it, not seeing a line of the sketches, and not being able to read a line of the jests appended to them. All he saw was that lovely figure down there at the roulette-table, with the forget-me-nots in her glittering hair and at her snowy bosom, and the turquoise collar round her throat.

"Billy!"

No one had ever called him Billy since the time when he had been a cowboy, getting up in the dark in bitter winter mornings to pitchfork the dung out of the stalls, and chop the great swedes and mangolds, and break the ice in the drinking-trough. Never in all her life had his wife ever dared to call him Billy. He knew the name made him ridiculous; he knew that he was the object of all that ringing laughter; he knew that he was made absurd, contemptible, odious; but he would not allow his daughter, nor would he allow any other person, to say so. He was hypnotized by that fair patrician who threw the mud in his face; the mud smelt as sweet to him as roses. It was only her pretty, airy, nonchalant way—the way she had *de par la grâce de Dieu* which became her so well, which was part and parcel of her, which was a mark of grace, like her delicate nostrils and her arched instep.

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When she had tired of her roulette, it irritated her extremely to see the large gorgeous form of Mrs. Massarene dozing on a couch and waking up with difficulty from dreams, no doubt, of cowslip meadows and patient cows whisking their tails over the dew; and the erect figure of her daughter sitting beside the grand piano and turning over the leaves of musical scores.

"Why don't you send your women to bed, Billy?" she said to him very crossly. "It fidgets one to see them eternally sitting there like the Horse Guards in their saddles at Whitehall. Politeness? Oh, is it meant for politeness? Well, I will give them a dispensation, then. Do tell them to go to bed; I am sure good creatures like those have lots of prayers to say before they go to by-bye!"

"Why don't you and your mother go to your rooms? We are all of us very late people," she said, directly, as she passed Katherine Massarene.

"You are my parents' guest, Lady Kenilworth; I endeavor not to forget it," was the reply.

"What does she mean by that?" her guest wondered; she thought she meant some covert rebuke. She did not at all like the steady contemptuous gaze of this young woman's tranquil eyes.

"Oh, my dear, how dreadfully old-fashioned and formal you are!" she cried, with an impatient little laugh; and the daughter of the house thought her familiarity more odious than her rudeness. She perceived the impression she made on the young woman whom she meant to marry Ronald.

"You see, I feel quite at home here," she added by way of explanation. "Of course, you know it was my cousin's house."

"I wonder you like to come to it," said Katherine as she paused. "It must be painful to see it in the hands of strangers, and those strangers common people."

"How droll you are!" cried Mouse, with another little laugh. "I am sure we shall be great friends when we come to know each other well."

Katherine was silent; and Mouse, slightly disconcerted, bade her a brief good night, and took her own way to the

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Bird rooms. For once in her life she had met a person whom she did not understand.

"Ronald shall marry her, but I shall always hate her," she thought, as she went to the Bird rooms. "However, everybody always hates their sisters-in-law, whoever they may be."

The young woman seemed intolerably insolent to her: so cold, so grave, so visibly disapproving herself; it was quite insupportable to have Billy's daughter giving herself grand airs like a tragedian at the Français. But for her intention to make Ronald marry the Massarene fortune she would have expressed her surprise and offence in unequivocal terms.

"Really, these new people are too absurd," she thought, as her maid disrobed her whilst the chimes of the clock tower rung in the fourth hour of the morning. "Too infinitely absurd. They must know that we don't come to their houses to see them; and yet they will stay in their drawing-rooms like so many figures of Tussaud. It is really too obtuse and ridiculous."

She was, however, too sleepy to reflect longer on their stolid obstinacy, or to decide how she should on the morrow best teach them their place.

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CHAPTER XV.

"*Elle a du chic; elle a positivement du chic,*" said the Duchesse d'Avit to her friends, in her great astonishment at the appearance and manner of the daughter of the house.

"It's easy to look *chic* when one's got as good a figure as she has," said one of the other ladies, rather crossly. "She does *look* like a well-bred person, I admit, but I dare say the cloven foot will show in some way or another."

They all watched for it with curiosity, so far at least as they troubled themselves to notice her at all. But they failed to perceive it. They found that she rode extremely well, and played wonderfully well too, but no one got on with her. She was extraordinarily silent, and they could not divine that she held her tongue so obstinately because she feared every moment that some stinging word would escape her.

The week seemed to her a year. She could not see the comedy of the thing as Framlingham had advised her to do. She could only resent helplessly, censure mutely, despise unavailingly, and suffer secretly. She might have been some doomed queen, passing from the prison to the scaffold; and all the incessant chatter and laughter around her awoke no echo in her; it always sounded to her derisive, a mockery of the absurdity of William Massarene masquerading as a country gentleman. She had read a good deal of philosophy, but she could not practice any. The only tolerable moments of the day or night to her were when she was alone in her own rooms with a stray rough large dog of nondescript breed she had found and adopted.

"If you must have a filthy beast of that kind, why don't you buy a decent bred one?" said her father. "They price 'em as high as a thousand guineas at the shows."

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"A dog who will sell for a thousand guineas," she replied, "will never want friends as long as the world is of its present complexion."

William Massarene swore an ugly oath.

"Why will you rile your father in that way?" said Margaret Massarene, as he left the room. "You know gold's his god. And let me tell you, my dear, that if ye'd ever known what 'tis to want it, ye'd tell a different tale. You've never had to want nor to wait for naught, for when ye was little I never stinted ye. Your brothers had died of the hard life, and you'd come late when I could do more for ye. Your father's a great man, my dear, and you should respect him, if there be failings as ye would change in him."

"No doubt you are right, mother," said her daughter humbly.

Perhaps, she thought, she was too unmindful of all that they had done for her. But, oh, if they had only left her to teach their letters to little rough children in the back woods, or play the harmonium in some little iron church buried in the pine gloom of some clearing!

"You must stay in my rooms," she said to the dog, "and only go out with me and never chase the deer, nor go into the covers, for you are in a civilized country which prides itself on its progress and piety, and whose men of light and leading slaughter harmless creatures for pleasure every season of the year. You are a mongrel, they say, poor boy? Well, I believe you are. But 'hath not a Jew eyes?' Has not a mongrel nerves to wince, and a heart to ache, and a body to feel cold and pain and hunger, and a fond soul to love somebody, if there be only somebody to love him?"

And the dog looked at her with his pathetic golden-brown eyes and understood, and was comforted.

Katherine Massarene, in her ignorance of the manifold wheels within wheels of a temperament and character like that of her father's most honored guest, thought that at least Lady Kenilworth showed some decent feeling in not being accompanied by Lord Brancepeth.

In point of fact she had not brought Harry because she retained a vivid recollection of his expressed desire to be allowed to ally himself with the heiress of Vale Royal.

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Besides, Harry, like greater men, had substitutes, and one of them had come down with her; a very agreeable and accomplished foreign diplomatist whose wife was remaining at Sandringham, a gentleman who would have been able to add many chapters to the *Psychologie de l'Amour*, who considered that brevity was the soul of love as of wit; and who had a good-humored contempt for Harry, such as very clever persons who are also amiable feel for other persons not very clever whom they are outwitting with discretion and amusement.

"*Pauvre garçon! il prend la chose en bon père de famille*," he said once, looking at Harry carrying little Gerry on his shoulders, with Jack clinging to his coat-pockets, in the park at Staghurst.

The gentleman preferred episodes which could be enjoyed like cigarettes, but, in this to cigarettes superior, leave no ash nor even a bit of burnt paper behind them. This distinguished representative of a Great Power was met by Mr. Massarene early one morning, when he went to see if the heating apparatus in the corridor was duly at the proper degree of caloric in the long tapestry-hung gallery which led to the Bird rooms, and led nowhere else. He was so unpleasantly astonished at the meeting that he stared open-mouthed at the elegant form of this gentleman, who, after a rapid glance round, which told him that to conceal himself was impossible, sauntered on calmly till he was close to his host, who kept the knob of an open valve in his hand.

"I hear you have some wonderful Battersea and Chelsea in there, Monsieur," he said with his soft meridional accent. "Miladi Kenilworth kindly offered to show it to me, but her maid says she is gone in the garden."

Mr. Massarene, to whom the words were somewhat unintelligible from their foreign pronunciation, only heard distinctly Battersea and Chelsea, names to him only suggestive of Primrose Habitations and political gatherings. He repeated the words mechanically and apologetically.

"Faïence," said the diplomatist in explanation; "china birds, very rare, very old, very curious."

Mr. Massarene's countenance cleared a little. "Oh, yes I believe there is some old china in that apartment. I

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could take your Excellency in to see it if Lady Kenilworth has gone out; did her maid say that she had?"

Though the ambassador's countenance was trained to express nothing it did express for an instant a lively alarm.

"Oh, some other time, on some other occasion," he said hurriedly. "It would not do at all to go into a lady's chambers in her absence."

Mr. Massarene felt that he had committed a solecism in proposing such a thing. Yet to his homely mind it seemed a still greater offence to go into her chamber when she was present.

He was perplexed, and uncertain of his ground, and intimidated by the rank and aspect of this notable foreigner; but he looked with an odd expression in his eyes at the dressing-gown of old-gold silk lined with pale rose plush in which the slender person of the visitor to the china birds was arrayed. It might be the custom for dilettanti to pay early morning visits in this kind of attire to see works of art, but he did not think that it was so. He was oppressed, amazed, annoyed, what his guest in the dressing-gown would have called *ombrageux*, and two conflicting feelings were at work within him: one a sombre jealousy and the other that offended sense of outraged propriety natural to the class to which he belonged.

But he was not sure of his ground, he scarcely dared to realize what he suspected, and he was afraid of this grand gentleman, who, on arrival, had offered him the tips of two fingers and had said that the day was cold, and had from that moment completely forgotten his existence, so that the urbanity and familiarity of this address in the corridor roused suspicion as well as embarrassment in his breast. To think that his house should be used to shelter improper dalliance awakened all the Puritan element in his Protestant breast, whilst as well as his outraged morality there arose in him a different, a more personal, feeling of wrath, vexation, and impatient envy; ridiculous, he knew, but unconquerable. But the diplomatist did not wait for him to disentangle his sentiments, nor did he offer any reason for the untimely hour of his own artistic ardor of investigation.

"*Au revoir, mon bon*," he said carelessly, and sauntered

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on till he reached the door at the other end of the gallery and vanished.

Mr. Massarene shut the valve of the heating-apparatus, and sighed; it was probably the first time in his unsentimental existence that he had ever sighed. How many things he had still to learn!

"Don't you keep a plumber, Billy?" said Mouse very sharply, later in the day; "don't you keep a plumber? What do you potter about the pipes yourself for? You woke me this morning opening and shutting those valves in the gallery."

He muttered his regrets. He was about to say that a distinguished guest had told him that she was already out in the gardens at the time of his inspection of the heating-apparatus; but he perceived that he was on slippery ground, and he held his tongue, observing meekly that he was very afraid of fires, that servants were a bad lot, not to be trusted, and that it was through their negligence that overheated flues burned down half the country houses in England. But he saw that she was deeply and inexplicably displeased.

As for the diplomatist, he was, of course, sufficiently trained in diplomacy to give no signs of displeasure; but in his secret soul he was extremely worried by his meeting with his host in the corridor, for though Lady Kenilworth was a lovely woman, and a very seductive one, yet to be the temporary substitute of that excellent young guardsman who carried her children pick-a-back had its dangers for an eminent person whom a public scandal would ruin. He wished her and the china birds and his own dressing-gown at the devil. He had no fancy for a cigarette which would burn the fingers which held it; some unimportant telegrams were brought to him an hour later, and he made believe that one of them was important and took his departure before dinner for London.

"Your Excellency will not see the china birds?" said William Massarene quietly and drily, with a finesse which astonished the hearer as he accompanied his departing guest to the carriage. Their eyes met. They understood each other.

"It will be an excuse to return to your amiable hos-

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pitalities," said the eminent person with a charming smile and an adorable salutation.

"*L'ours saurait mordre*," he thought, as he leaned back in the bear's warm little station-brougham.

The departure annoyed Mouse unspeakably. He was only an episode; but, as an episode should be, amusing and interesting. He was a man of many brilliant *bonnes fortunes*, and the stories he had told her of women she hated were beyond measure diverting. She treated her host more cruelly than ever; and had never felt so irritated at the sight of his short squat figure, and his broad rough hands, and his splay feet in his varnished shoes.

Mr. Massarene was much exercised in his mind as to his idol. He could not get the diplomatist in the elegant dressing-gown out of his mind; and he also heard on all sides that the handsome fool, of whom he had purchased Blair Airon, was undoubtedly considered as "best friend" of the lady who had been the intermediary in that sale. These, and various similar facts, left him no peace in his private reflections, and tormented him the more because he did not venture to unburden his wrath to the fair cause of it. He had been a virtuous man all his life; he had had no time to be otherwise; he had been so busy eighteen hours out of the twenty-four making money that the other six he had spent in eating like a hungry hound, and sleeping like a tired dray-horse. Vice had always represented itself to him as waste of precious time and waste of precious dollars. His rare concessions to it had been grudging and hurried, like his attendance at church.

His discovery disturbed him exceedingly, not only because he was a very moral man who considered that immorality ought to be punished (he had once even made one of a body of moral citizens who, in a township of the West, had stripped and beaten a local Guinevere and tarred and feathered her Lancelot), but he was also visited by that bluest of blue devils who had never paid him a visit in his life before—jealousy.

She knew it very well, and it diverted her, though it appeared to her as preposterous as if her pad-groom had been jealous. But he, who did not exactly know what ailed him, suffered alternately from the irritation and the

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depression common to all those in whose breasts the green-eyed monster has found a throne.

"Billy, come and talk to me," said his enslaver the last evening of her visit. Mr. Massarene obeyed, fascinated out of any will of his own, and in love with his own degradation as fakirs with their torture. She saw his struggles and tortures, which seemed to her as preposterous in him as they would have seemed in a stableman or a street-sweeper. But though she had no patience with them she turned them to account.

She was sitting in a very low long chair in a nook of one of the drawing-rooms amongst flowers; she wore a black lace gown with immense transparent sleeves, and some strings of pearls were wound round her throat; her skin looked fairer than ever, her eyes bluer, her hair lovelier. He took meekly the low seat she assigned to him, though it had no rest for his back, and gazed at her, remembering despite himself the Chelsea and Battersea birds and the connoisseur who had wished to see, or had seen, them. He was not deceived by her for a moment, but he was hypnotized.

"There is something I want you to do, Billy," she added very candidly—she was always candid in manner. Mr. Massarene murmured that she had only to command and he only to obey.

"That is very nice of you, but there are other people in it," she replied. He waited mutely to hear more. She sent some cigarette smoke across his eyes. "I mean you to marry your daughter to my brother."

He was silent.

The thought was not new to his own mind; he had felt sure that she would desire it; but to himself it presented no attractions; he did not understand the antiquity and purity of the Courcy blood, and his own ambitions for his heiress ranged in much loftier spheres.

"Why don't you answer?" said Mouse, beginning to feel offence. "I should have thought you would have been overjoyed."

"They don't know each other," he objected feebly.

"What has that to do with it? When you and I settle a thing that thing has to be done. Ronnie and your

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daughter were made in heaven for each other; they are both awfully stiff, intensely disagreeable, and preëminently virtuous. There'd be no more cakes and ale in our world if those two could reform it."

Mr. Massarene was still mute; he did not at all know what to say; at last he asked humbly if Lord Hurstmanceaux had said anything on the subject.

"I haven't consulted him," she replied, this time with genuine candor. "I never consult people when I am acting for their good, and my brother never talks unless he lectures somebody. This thing has to be done, Billy. You know when I say a thing I mean it."

"But you laugh at my daughter," he said with hesitation.

"Oh, I laugh at everybody," said Mouse. "People are made to be laughed at. There's something ridiculous in everyone if you only look for it. Your daughter seems ridiculous to me because she gives herself goody-goody airs, which nobody has nowadays; she looks as if she were always doing penance for your ill-gotten riches."

This shaft hit the gold of fact so neatly in the eye that William Massarene colored angrily under his dull skin. But his rage was against his daughter rather than against his tormentor. Why could not Katherine look and act like other young women of her time?

"Yes, I know," said Mouse, answering his unspoken reflections. "It must be very annoying to have a perpetual monitress in one's own daughter, and of course you couldn't make your millions with clean hands; nobody can; but society gives you lots of soap and water after you've made them, so what does it matter? Besides, a daughter shouldn't look as if she were always saying, 'Out, damned spot,' as Ellen Terry does. However, that is just the kind of thing that will please Ronald. He will think it such an admirable spirit in her to despise your ill-gotten gold."

"Perhaps he would not require a dowry of dirty money with her, then?" said Mr. Massarene, allowing for one instant the natural sarcastic shrewdness in him to escape.

Mouse was for the moment discomfited; she had never

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seen this unpleasant side of him before. Then, with her most insolent audacity, she blew some cigarette-smoke over to where he sat.

"My dear Billy, perhaps Ronald would dispense with a dowry if he liked her well enough; he is fool enough for anything. But you wouldn't save a penny by that—I should take it all over as commission!"

Mr. Massarene was dumb from astonishment. He had known many sharp dealers in the Far West, but nobody who had ever for coolness equalled his fair friend and patroness.

He slapped his hand on his knee with vulgar effusion in his mingled feelings of amazement and admiration.

"Well, my lady, damn me if there's many boys in Bowery who could afford to give points to *you!*"

She laughed. Of course it was only a joke; but the joke made her feel for the moment a little insecure and uncomfortable, as you might feel if you found a packet of dynamite in your sandwich-case.

"Of course the marriage would be a very good thing for Ronald," said his sorceress, with her frankest accents —her frankness was one of her chief weapons—"but it would be good for you too, Billy. It would place you. There are people who jib at you still, you know; when once you were one of us, they wouldn't dare."

Mr. Massarene was silent. He thought if there were still people who jibbed at him, he had paid very dearly for the patronage of this fair sponsor. He was beginning to feel his feet a little on his new ground and to be a little less easily led about; but at the same time he was as much in love as a cold-blooded, circumspect, puritan-minded man could be, and she dazzled his sight and his senses and led him whither she would. He made a faint endeavor to assert his independence.

"Lord Hurstmanceaux has never even condescended to know me. It seems odd he should be anxious to enter my family."

"Enter your family!" echoed Mouse, with a laugh of derision which brought the blood into his puffy pale cheeks. "Oh, my good Billy, don't try on those grandiose phrases! I never said *he* wanted anything of the

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kind; I said *I* mean you to give him your daughter, and you know when I mean a thing I have it done."

Mr. Massarene was cowed; he felt an awkward, ignorant, vulgar booby under the flashing fires of her contemptuous eyes. There was nothing left in him of the stolid self-assurance and self-admiration with which he had spoken at the public meeting a few days earlier. Before the mocking presence of his enchantress he felt only a stupid, illiterate, helpless booby and boor. He felt that men respected his riches; he felt that Mouse Kenilworth only meant to annex them.

"My daughter is not an easy person to control," he said with hesitation, "and I think she and you don't hit it off, my lady, do you?"

"No," said his guest shortly; "but that don't matter. There's no law that I know of to love one's brother's wife. Anyhow, that's what I mean you to do with her. Of course, my brother is a poor man, you know that; but that is no consequence to you. What you want is an assured position, and alliance with us will *poser* you. Ronnie's word has great weight in society."

"But Lord Hurstmanceaux have never given me even good day, not even when he's seen me in your own house, my lady."

"Don't say 'my lady.' Can't you break yourself of it? Of course, he'll have to speak to you if he marries your daughter. I must get you all asked to some country house where he goes; the thing will come of itself. I'll think it over and tell you where I send him."

She spoke as if she were telling her major-domo how many people she expected to dinner.

Mr. Massarene naturally concluded that Hurstmanceaux himself was in the plot. He did not dare to object further, and temporized by dropping the subject.

"But—but," he said with a timid attempt to obtain a *quid pro quo*, "would you do one little thing to oblige me; would you—would you—not play, not gamble, any more in my houses?"

He was intensely frightened when he had said it, but he felt that it might injure him with his coveted constituency

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if it were known that there was roulette, real roulette, in his drawing-rooms.

Her eyes grew of a steely coldness, of an electric luminance, and seemed to transfix him as with barbed arrows. She threw away the end of her cigarette as she got out of her chair with that graceful abruptness peculiar to her. "I told you the other night, Billy, where *I* am the house is mine. An Irishman said something like that I believe about the head of the table. Ronnie don't play. He'll do the policeman for you when he marries your daughter. Meanwhile, just let me alone, my good man, or you'll be sorry."

Wherewith she carried her elegant person and her trailing black laces to the other end of the room where Fabian Delkass, the fashionable salon-singer, was tuning his great Spanish guitar and softly warbling fragments of Lassen.

Mouse knew nothing about music and cared as little, but ditties softly warbled by a very good-looking tenor have attractions outside the science of melody; she could appreciate the talent of Delkass, because he never sung a note under twenty guineas each warble. She had sent him down to Vale Royal, she had arranged that he should receive ten times as much there as his usual terms for such country house engagements; in return Delkass, who was *beau garçon* and very courteous to pretty women, would be sure to sing something charming at her own afternoons in London for nothing at all.

She despised artists as a mere flock of sheep; silly edible obscure creatures; but as she ate a mutton cutlet for luncheon when it was very well cooked, so she nibbled at an artist now and then, when he was very much the fashion.

If she were obliged to have recourse to these expedients it was not her fault; it was the fault of her father-in-law, who was so miserably stingy, and of her settlements which were so miserable, and of society which compels anybody who is in it to live in a certain way. Why did Providence (a vague personage in whom she as vaguely believed) put you where you were obliged every day to do quantities of things which cost money unless that arbiter of fate supplied you with the necessary means?

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CHAPTER XVI.

THERE was an old friend of his mother to whom Hurstmanceaux was much attached, a Mrs. Raby of Bedlowes, with whom he invariably spent a few days at Whitsuntide. Bedlowes was a romantic and historic old manor in Hampshire, famous for its gigantic yew-trees, and a bowling-green on which Charles the First had played. To this elderly lady Mouse frankly unfolded her budget of matrimonial projects; and Mrs. Raby, who shared the prejudices of Hurstmanceaux against *novi homines*, but was persuaded to conquer them for the general good, consented to allow the Massarenes to be presented to her at a Marlborough House party, and graciously invited them to go to her for a couple of days in Whitsun week. When the time came Mr. Massarene, who was told nothing, but surmised that this was the place at which the meeting with Hurstmanceaux was arranged, took his daughter down to this historic and romantic old house; it had belonged to John of Gaunt, and had sheltered in the centuries of its existence many noble and unfortunate personages, the traditions of whose sojourn did not agree with the visit of "Blasted Blizzard" to its stately guest-chambers and its tapestried halls.

Mrs. Raby was a person genial, kind-hearted, and of great simplicity of manner and taste, who pleased Katherine and did not alarm her father; indeed he thought, irreverentially, to himself, "Blast me if she don't look like an old New England Shaker sempstress," for the *châtelaine* of Bedlowes wore her own grey hair in the fashion of the year '40, had plain black gowns made by her women, and a very simple and homely manner. There was a large party assembled, of notable and interesting people, amongst whom William Massarene was as a false note in a Beethoven rendering. But society, even the best society, has grown used to such false notes, and does not mind them. There is the ring of gold in the discord.

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Daddy Gwyllian, who was there—as where was he not?—said to his hostess, who was his cousin, as were ninety-nine out of every hundred persons:

"Why, bless us and save us, my dear Adela, have *you* been brought to recognize the new man from North Dakota? I thought you were the last Tory stronghold still left standing in the country? Do you mean you have capitulated to Harrenden House?"

Mrs. Raby's sweet temper was a little ruffled.

"The man is a sound Tory," she said pettishly. "If I have him here I have a very good reason for doing so."

Daddy drew back a step and stared at her in mock amazement.

"Everybody who has him anywhere has a very good reason for doing so. But do you mean to say, Adela, that *you* want to get on a Company, or sell a spavined racer, or weed your gallery of dubious Holbeins or spurious Romneys at a profit, or get useful hints as to Canadian or Pacific booms?"

Mrs. Raby laughed.

"No, I don't want to do any of those things. I want Ronald to have a chance to admire his daughter."

Daddy laughed his inward chuckling laughter; and indulged in a prolonged whistle.

"Well, my dear Adela, you won't want a commission for bringing the match about as most of 'em would do. But I think I know who'd get a pretty high one if it ever come off. Lady Kenny set you on, of course?"

His hostess, who did not like the phrase "set on" as applied to herself, replied stiffly:

"It would be a good thing in many ways. She is charming. She could not look more thoroughbred if she were an archduchess, and you know he is very poor despite all his self-denial. I would not for worlds," she continued with warmth, "be privy to any marriage in which either the man or the woman were sacrificed for mere money. But if they should like each other there could be no harm done but a great deal of good; and you know that any woman who marries Ronnie will have a heart of gold in her keeping."

Daddy nodded.

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"Ronnie's all right. But he's a horse you may lead to the water; he aren't a horse you can make drink. When is he coming?"

"To-night. You know he is the most punctual and faithful of persons. He has spent the Whitsun week with me ever since his first year at Eton."

Daddy chuckled. "Lord, it will be a rare sight when he finds out what you've let him in for! His sister has been hammering at him for two years to make him know those people."

"'It is well to begin with a little aversion,'" quoted Mrs. Raby. "Don't say anything to him, pray; you would spoil it all."

"I never say anything indiscreet," replied Daddy, with truth. "But he'll twig it for himself in a jiffy; Ronnie's real sharp."

"What odious vulgarisms!" said Mrs. Raby. "You grow very vulgar, Daddy."

"Must keep pace with the times," replied Daddy; "secret of keeping young, as Bulwer says somewhere. It's kind of you to give me this little bit of comedy. Why on earth do people go to nasty draughty theatres and get cricks in their neck when they have society all around 'em to make 'em laugh?"

It was the tea-hour on the following day when Hurstmanceaux arrived. Everyone was in the library, a long, fine room worthy of the volumes it enshrined, of which many were rare and all well-chosen. Daddy, comfortably ensconced in a corner, with a cup in his hand and some hot buttered scone at his elbow, waited for the coming scene. The library was dimly lighted by the descending sun, which itself was dim. He saw that Hurstmanceaux did not on his entry perceive the Massarenes, and stood by Mrs. Raby's chair for some minutes talking with her and greeting old friends; but he also saw, which surprised him, that Katherine Massarene, who was at some distance from that table and seated at another, changed countenance visibly and rose as if to leave the room, then sat down again with a pained and startled expression on her face.

"She aren't in the game," thought Daddy. "But why

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the deuce does she look like that because he's come into the room?"

Mr. Massarene drew near his daughter and whispered to her: "That man just come in is Hurstmanceaux; Mrs. Raby'll bring him up to us. Be civil."

Daddy was too far off to hear the words, but he guessed what they were; he saw that Katherine looked distressed, annoyed, perplexed, and began hurriedly to talk with the people round her. "She knows what they're after, and she don't like it," thought Daddy. He could not tell that in her ears and in her memory were resounding the scornful sentences, the withering sarcasms, which had been spoken to her in the walk over the frozen fields to Great Thorpe.

After a time, while Daddy watched them from his snug corner, Mrs. Raby rose and put her hand on Hurstmanceaux's arm.

"Let me present you to some friends of Clare's whom I think you don't know as yet," she murmured softly; and ere he could be aware of what was being done with him, he was led off to Katherine and her father.

Daddy watched the arrival of the unsuspecting chief actor with that lively interest which he always felt in his own amusement. He had no kind of sympathy with such prejudices as Ronald's; he would himself have dined with a sweep if the sweep could have given him something unusually good to eat; but he liked prejudices in others as an element of human comedy which frequently produced the most diverting situations.

"He's the toughest fellow in creation," he thought. "They'll no more change him than they'll make an ironclad into a lady's slipper."

Ronald, although the most easy-going and unconventional of men in intimacy, had the coldness and the stiffness of the English man of rank when he was annoyed or felt himself outwitted. He was perfectly correct in his manner, but that manner was glacial as he realized the trap which had been laid in his path; he looked eight feet in height as he bent his head in recognition of Katherine Massarene and her father.

She was as cold as himself, and Mr. Massarene was

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divided between a feeling of great embarrassment and a desire to propitiate a person whom he saw was not easy to win over by any means. In his difficulty he said the worst thing he could have said:

"I hope, Lord Hurstmanceaux," he stammered, pronouncing correctly the name as society pronounced it, Hurceaux—"I venture to hope we shall be friends; your sister, Lady Kenilworth, wishes it so much."

"My sister's friends are seldom mine," replied Ronald with extreme incivility; then, fearing he might be thought to imply—as he did—something to her prejudice, added in icy accents, "I mean that her set is not mine."

"Indeed! Is that so, sir?" said Mr. Massarene, surprised; for the mystery of "Sets" was still unmastered by him, he only understood Classes. "The Prince is coming to stay with me at Vale Royal," he added; "might I hope that you too———?"

"I am not in the Prince's set," said Hurstmanceaux curtly, and seeming to the eyes of Mr. Massarene to become ten feet in height. The reply was altogether beyond him.

"Not in the Prince's set," he thought to himself; "what on earth can the fellow mean?"

"Don't you go to Court, my lord?" he said aloud in his bewilderment.

Ronald's severity relaxed despite himself; he laughed outright. Katherine stood by, indignant, ashamed, frozen by humiliation and anger into a statue. At last, in desperation, she turned to her father:

"Lord Hurstmanceaux would hardly care to come to us at his cousin's place. He must have shot there many seasons. I think Mrs. Raby is looking for you. Someone has arrived."

Mr. Massarene hurried toward his hostess and her tea-table; with a chilly inclination of the head his daughter followed him, and left Hurstmanceaux to his own reflections.

The foremost of these was, that it was a pity so thoroughbred-looking a woman has such an unutterable brute for a sire. The second was that he had been guilty himself of discourtesy and incivility toward a lady to whom

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he already owed some apology. But he was extremely angry at the snare which had been spread for him in this innocent old house of Bedlowes.

He stayed three days in the same house with them, because he had no decent pretext to hasten his departure, but he avoided all chance of increased acquaintance as he would have avoided the bubonic plague in his travels through Thibet.

"He's only a second-class earl and gives himself such airs as that!" said Mr. Massarene, in great displeasure, to his daughter when he could speak to her unheard.

"What do you mean by a second-class earl? It is an expression unknown in 'Burke,'" asked his daughter in her coldest accents. Mr. Massarene explained that he meant an earl who had very little money, whose chief estates were in Ireland, and who was not a knight of any Order or anything of that decorative kind.

"And he said that he doesn't even go to Court," he ended as a climax.

"He said nothing of the kind," replied Katherine. "He said he was not in the Prince's set, which means—well, which means—never mind what it means. As for his rank, it is a very old creation; at least, very old for England; the Courcys of Faldon go back to the Conqueror."

Mr. Massarene looked sharply at his daughter. "I thought you didn't like the man?"

"I neither like nor dislike him. I do not know him."

Then as this seemed to her sensitive conscience something approaching to an untruth, she added: "I met Lord Hurstmanceaux as I came to Vale Royal in the train that snowy day, but that can scarcely be called an acquaintance. I think you had better not ask him there, if you will allow me to say so, for he seemed much irritated at his cousin's sale of the place to you."

"The damned starched puppy! What is the sale to him? Roxhall's old enough to know his own business, eh?" muttered Mr. Massarene, as he thought to himself that the pet project of Lady Kenilworth would not be easy of realization. It was certainly not farther advanced by her careful arrangement of the visit to Bedlowes.

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"Why did you set up your back like that, Ronnie?" said Daddy to him in the evening. "Man is a beast, but girl is good form."

"I have not a word to say against her," replied Hurstmanceaux. "But as it is impossible to know her without knowing her father, I relinquish the pleasure of doing so."

"Buckram!" said Daddy. "'Tisn't worn nowadays. Even soldiers don't have stocks any longer."

"It is not buckram. It is common decency. That infernal cad is living in Gerald's house."

"Well, that is Gerald's fault, I suppose, for selling it. You are wrong, Ronnie—quite wrong. Miss Massarene is well-bred enough to get her father accepted. In point of fact he is accepted; he goes everywhere."

"She is very distinguished-looking. But I don't know what that has to do with it," said Hurstmanceaux in his stiffest and crossest manner. "As for your seeing him anywhere, you won't see him at Faldon. I wish Mrs. Raby had told me of her intentions; I should not have come here. I have avoided these people everywhere for two years."

"People don't send a list of their guests on approval except to Royalty. They'd never fill their houses if they did. Miss Massarene knows your sentiments, don't she? Her back was up as well as yours."

"Certainly she knows them. I have never made a secret of them. Who could suppose that at Bedlowes of all places one would come across that cad?"

Daddy yawned and shut his eyes.

"I think you know," he said drowsily, "that as your sister has run 'em you ought to back 'em. Must back one's own stable!"

"My sister's stable is not mine," replied Hurstmanceaux quickly. "She runs her dark uns wholly on her own responsibility."

"Of course, of course," said Daddy. "But the young woman's fit for any stables. How she came by it I don't know, but she's uncommonly well-bred."

"She appears so," said Ronald. "But she must dree her weird. She can no more escape the penalty of being

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her father's daughter than a hangman's daughter can escape hers."

It was not a liberal sentiment, but it was one which seemed perfectly natural and just to the views which he took of life.

He was deeply angry with his sister and Mrs. Raby. It seemed to him a monstrously barefaced piece of intrigue to have brought him and the Massarenes under the same roof. He did not think Katherine herself privy to it; there had been surprise and trouble as well as embarrassment in her eyes when he had been led up to her; but he was sure that her father had been in the plot.

He spoke in his usual tone; not loud, but not very low. He had his back turned to a grand piano of Erard's which stood in a recess; but Daddy Gwyllian had his face turned to it, and he could see through his sleepy eyes that Katherine Massarene, who with some men around her was at that moment approaching the instrument, had, though at some distance, heard the last part of this speech regarding the hangman's daughter. He was certain that she had done so by a flush which rose over her face and a momentary pause which she made. In another instant she had reached the Erard and seated herself by it. If she had felt any emotion it did not make her touch less clear, her memory less perfect, as she played through the grand passage of Beethoven's Sonata in E flat.

Daddy did not hear the sonata; he was away in the land of dreams, comfortably hidden behind a huge African palm-tree, his placid round face looking as innocent as a babe's in his slumber; even his curiosity could not keep him awake any longer.

Hurstmanceaux, who loved and understood good music, listened charmed despite himself; but when the last chords thrilled through the air he did not join the group which gathered round her, but walked away to another of the drawing-rooms.

From the distance he could see her as she sat at the pianoforte receiving the compliments of the men about her; but the expression of her countenance was proud, cold and bored. She had looked very different on the Woldshire highroad and in the market-place of the little town.

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He felt sorry for her; there was something in her bearing, in her manner, in her countenance, so far superior to her parentage and position. She looked like the last scion of some great unfortunate race rather than the heiress of new ill-gotten millions.

"*Où prenez vous ce ton qui n'appartient qu' à vous?*" he thought; and he acquitted her of any conspiracy in the cross-country walk, any complicity in his sister's manœuvres to make her meet him at Bedlowes. She was undoubtedly a victim of circumstances—a square-cut ivory peg which was ill fitted to the round gilded hole into which it was forced. He did not for a moment doubt the sincerity of her dislike to her position; his own nature was one which enabled him to understand the revolt of hers. "But she must dree her weird," he thought again.

"Why are you so uncivil to that charming person who renders Beethoven so perfectly?" said his hostess to him that evening.

"There is no harm in the charming person, but there is a great deal in her antecedents," replied Hurstmanceaux very coldly.

"Oh, 'antecedents,' my dear Ronnie! Who can look at them? Royalty itself disregards them when—when——"

"When there's money enough! I am not bound to follow the example of Royalty."

"You did what was unworthy of you, my dear old friend," he added. "Of course Mouse egged you on; but you should know what Mouse is by this time."

"Indeed she meant no harm in this instance. She knows that you want money."

"I do not want money. I have not got very much at my command: that is another matter."

"But the boys are such a drag on you?"

"Oh, no, they are fine fellows; they interest me, and they do very much what I tell them."

"You are a good man, Ronald, but you are obstinate and prejudiced."

"*On a les défauts de ses qualités.* I am not sure that I can boast any especial *qualités*, but I do know this, that I would be shot to-morrow rather than shake hands with a

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low brute who comes from God knows where with probably untold crimes upon his conscience."

Mrs. Raby shuddered and gave a nervous glance to the far distance where Mr. Massarene was playing whist. She was a delicate aged woman, and the idea of entertaining an undetected criminal was extremely painful to her.

"He does look very like Cruickshank's burglars in *Oliver Twist*," she thought, regarding the round bullet head and Camus nose of her guest as he scowled down on the cards which he held; he was losing, and losing to the Principal of an Oxford College, whilst a Cabinet Minister was his (very inefficient) partner; but Mr. Massarene did not like losing—even at half-crown points and in the best company. He had not had much practice at whist; but he possessed a mathematical brain, and grasped its combinations admirably; and he would have made his inferior hand do the work of a good one if the Cabinet Minister had not been an ass, but had been able to second him.

"They put men in the Government here," he thought, "who over yonder we should not think had brains enough to drive a sweet stuff barrow on a plank walk."

For despite the deference which he really felt for the world into which he had entered, he could not help the shrewd good sense in him boiling up sometimes into a savage contempt. To his rough strong temper and his unscrupulous keenness the gentlemen who were now his companions in life did seem very poor creatures.

"If I ever get into the Cabinet I'll show them the time of day," he thought very often. There was no reason why he should not get into the Cabinet as he had once got into the House. He was made of the solid metal, and the plebeian respectability, with which patrician conservatism, trembling in its shoes for its own existence, is delighted to ally itself; and knew that he would make a very good minister of the type which works hard, pleases the public, is always mentioned with praise by the Press of the Party, and lends itself to the illustration of admirable public dinner speeches in praise of the Constitution, and of that constitutional bulwark the Middle Class. He was a very shrewd man and he had the golden gift of

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silence. He knew his shortcomings better than his wife knew hers, and so concealed his ambitions more successfully. Nobody could "draw" him. Men in the smoking-room of his own or other houses often tried after dinner to make him "give himself away," but they never succeeded. He was never warmed by wine or friendship into indiscreet reminiscences or revelations.

Moreover in business he was *facile princeps;* no one could beat him in the supreme knowledge of money or how to make it. And indeed the thorough knowledge of and capacity for business does carry its own weight with it in an age in which the Mercurius of mart and change is chief of all the gods.

In society he was a heavy, awkward, common-looking man, who did not know what to do with his hands, and always sat on the edge of his chair, with his legs very wide apart. But in a clubroom, a committee-room, a board-room, a bank parlor, anywhere where there was question of the sowing and reaping of gold, he was a totally different person; he was at his ease, on his ground, master of his subject and of his hearers; his hands rested on his knees with a firm grip, his words were trenchant, convincing, logical; and on his pallid, fleshy, expressionless face there came a look, very hard, very unmerciful, very cunning, but a look of intelligence and power, and of entire command of his object. The mind showed through the envelope of flesh.

It was a money-making mind, a harsh astute grasping mind, a mean ignoble greedy mind, but it was a master mind in its way, and as such impressed itself on all those who encountered it on its field of combat. And the men that came into contact with him knew that he had been a day laborer who had, entirely by his own ability and industry, become the possessor of a colossal fortune, and all men respect this successful self-help, and few inquire if the self-help had been made with clean hands.

He was what is called an essentially worthy man, and he was an essentially modern product of modern energies.

He had no perceivable sins, he conformed to all religious observances, he had always kept on the right side

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of the law, he never made a jest, and he never lost a shilling. As a husband he was faithful, as a father exemplary, as a Christian devout, and as a citizen blameless. If thousands of people had cursed him, if tens of thousands of workmen had sweated for him, if hundreds of thousands of cattle had perished for him, if gambling hells and drinking shops and opium dens had enriched him, if rotten ships and starved crews, and poisonous trades and famished families had helped to make the splendors of Harrenden House and the glories of Vale Royal, these facts did not matter to either society or Christianity, and were mere personal details into which nobody could enter. William Massarene was one of those persons who are the pillars of the great middle class and the sources of that healthy plebeian blood from which a decaying patriciate is recruited.

"I stand by all as upholds property," he said one day to Lord Greatrex, the great Conservative leader.

"The Northern Farmer has said it before you," murmured that gentleman. "The creed is sound and simple, if not popular."

Massarene dared not swear in such a presence, but he thought, "Damn popularity!"

He did not want to be popular. He despised the people: which was very natural, for he had come from them. He liked to drive behind his sleek high-bred carriage horses and see the crowd part in the Strand or on the Embankment, and women and children scurry and stumble to make way for his progress; it made him realize the vast distance which now separated himself from the common multitude.

He would have liked, if it had been possible, to knock down half-a-dozen of the rabble as a sign of his superiority. But he was in a country full of policemen and prejudices, and so he had to show his superiority in another manner. One morning, when he was driving to a meeting in the City with a member of parliament, who was a noted philanthropist, in his brougham, his high-stepping bays did knock down an old woman, lame and very poorly clad. William Massarene held all women in slight esteem, but old women were in his estimate wholly useless and ob-

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noxious; he would have put them all at forty years old in lethal chambers. When cattle were past bearing they went to the shambles, eh?

But, having a philanthropist beside him, and two policemen at his carriage door, he busied himself about this maimed old female, had her put in a cab, told his footman to go on the box with her, and ordered his card to be given to the authorities of the nearest hospital.

"Say I will provide for her for life," he said to his servant rather loudly.

The people in the street cheered him.

"That's a real gemman!" said a baker's boy.

William Massarene threw the discerning lad a shilling.

"Dear friend," said the religious philanthropist with emotion, "how glad I am to see that your immense prosperity has not driven out the warmth of human sympathy from your heart."

Massarene was sorely tempted to put his tongue in his cheek, but as he saw that the philanthropist's face was quite grave he kept his own equally serious.

"You've an uncommon lot of barebacked poor for a Christian country, sir," he said in return—a reply which somewhat disconcerted the philanthropist.

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CHAPTER XVII.

In the autumn of the year the general election took place, and Southwoldshire returned William Massarene, whilst Limehouse selected a labor member to represent its interests. His majority was smaller than the Carlton agent had calculated and the Conservative press prophesied, but that made little impression on him, though it disappointed his party. A large portion of the country-folks would not hear of the newcomer, who had turned out the Roxhalls. "He's no more nor us, that chap, and an uncommon ugly jowl he've got," said one old gaffer to another, as they munched their noonday snack under the hedge which they had been cutting down into the hideousness demanded by high farming, or behind which they had been drenching the mosses and lichens of old apple-trees with a solution of lime and sublimate of iron, as scientific experts advise.

He took with the yokels to a certain extent, as the marquis had said, but not in those districts where the Roxhalls were beloved, and where the laborers liked a gentleman and knew one when they saw him. Moreover, the clergy of the county backed him to a man, and that lost him many votes from the rustic population. "Passon knows which side his bread be buttered," said the old gaffers; and even the influence of Lady Kenilworth and other Primrose Dames, who came down to canvass for him, and who did not scruple to plead and to promise everything possible and impossible, could turn them to the side espoused by the Established Church.

"My cousin Roxhall begs you to plump for his friend," she assured them; but the gaffers smelt the lie, and were not to be caught by chaff. They were corrupted by political bunkum, weakened in their marrow by a tawdry and trumpery civilization, bewildered by the multitude of their teachers and flatterers, but they were still the descendants in direct line of the bowmen of Cressy and

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the king's troopers of Naseby, and they knew good blood when they saw it, and did not like the look of the gold man from Ameriky.

However, by the aid of that man in the moon, whose occult and untraceable influence determines all political elections all the world over, these loyal and sturdy rustics were put in the minority, and the clergy and the county people crowded them out at the polls.

"Lord save us! How they dawdle over matters here!" thought the successful candidate. "In Dakota I'd just have run in thirty thousand miners, and the trick'd been done." He almost, for an instant, regretted that he had forsaken the congenial country of mug-wamps and roar-backs, where the ten-dollar bill could satisfactorily circulate and settle everything, as the power of the purse should do. He was with difficulty restrained from exercising those feudal rights which he conceived were his through the possession of Vale Royal, and giving notice to quit to everybody on his estate who had voted against him.

"If my hands had voted against me in the States," he said, with his blackest frown, "they'd hev known a hotter hole than hell."

"Yes, Billy, but we are not in the States," said his fair guide, philosopher and friend, "and there *are* a *few* people here who can't be bought, and mustn't be bullied."

"One don't meet that sort in society, nor see 'em in church," he growled under his breath.

"Perhaps you don't," she replied, not well pleased. "But they are not a *quantité négligéable*. I mean, you mustn't set their backs up and their tongues wagging. I don't know what the Carlton wouldn't do to you if you turned out the lowest Tommy Trot of them all from one of your cottages, because he voted against you. On the contrary, it is to that particular Tommy Trot who voted against you that you must send coals and blankets at Christmas, and port wine and beef tea when he gets fever."

He muttered that he couldn't do more than that for the Tommy Trots who had voted for him.

"Of course you can't," she answered. "And for them you may do less."

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William Massarene pondered silently on this reply, and came to the conclusion that if political life in England was much less corrupt than in the States—as they all said—it was certainly, also, much more complicated. On the whole, he had preferred Limehouse to Southwoldshire; the London mechanics had understood him with a wink, and their stomachs had not "riz" at bribery direct or indirect.

"My vote's my own, ain't it?" one rivet maker there had said to him. "Well, I can do what I like with my own, can't I? I can wallup my old 'ooman, and my brats, and my dawg, and I can sell my vote, that's flat. Yah! —hand the blunt over, old un."

That was a practical politician, with whom he had rejoiced to make a deal. But these rural electors, who turned him out of their hovels, and chalked up on their walls "Roxhalls for us; not no Yankees," were so abhorrent to his feelings as a county magnate and a future peer that he would have seen them all dead of fen fever with pleasure, and would not have sent them a single drop of port wine, however much Lady Kenny and the Carlton had counseled it. But she and the Carlton between them contrived to restrain him from any public or compromising expression of his feelings, and although there was some talk of a petition against his return being made, it never went farther than words, and when the new Parliament assembled, William Massarene represented in it one of the most aristocratic counties in England, which had been represented by some Roxhall's nominee ever since George the Third had ascended the throne.

"One of the infamous results of that inexcusable sale," said Hurstmanceaux, in the smoking-room of the Marlborough.

The remark was reported to a lady who did not love Roxhall, and who caused it to be reported in turn to him at the French watering-place where he was curing his body and fretting his soul.

"Ronnie might guess who was under the sale," he thought, "who had the gilt off the gingerbread." His cousin Mouse had always done what she chose with him. Their families knew it, his wife knew it, his county knew

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it. He was in other ways a clever and high spirited man, but she made him a fool, a coward, a tool, a laughing-stock. It seemed to him that Ronnie might know that and excuse him.

"Well, Billy, how do you get on in the House?" asked Lady Kenilworth one evening after Whitsuntide when she had been dining with him.

Mr. Massarene did not immediately reply. "Billy" was always a very hard morsel for him to swallow.

"I hear they're very pleased with you," she added graciously.

"Indeed, my lady?"

"Don't say 'my lady.' Surely you might have left that off by this time. Yes, you get on there they say. It is very difficult you know."

She was not pleased that he had become politically successful; she knew that it would make him more independent of her, and that he would now find many to "show him the way" with whom Cocky could not compete. She was driven to rely for her influence on his admiration of her, which bored her to extinction but which was a fulcrum she could not neglect. Then there was that odious cat, as she called his daughter, though Katherine Massarene had very little that was feline in her. The presence of Katherine Massarene was as unpleasant to her as the presence in a card-room of a very calm and intelligent player, who is not playing but looking on with an eyeglass in his eye, is to the man who is cheating at bac'.

"Why couldn't that young woman stay in India and marry one of Framlingham's household?" she thought with great irritation, and William Massarene himself began to think the same; his daughter frequently made him feel uncomfortable when her glance dwelt on him where he sat beside Lady Kenilworth at a race or a ball or an opera; he felt like a boy detected in trying to climb a pear-tree.

"Damn it all, if I ever get the pears, I've paid precious high for 'em," he thought; all the same his daughter's calm, contemplative, contemptuous glance made him feel that at his age he had no business to be tempted by such sweet forbidden fruit.

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"What do you watch me for so?" he said savagely one day. "I was not aware that I did," she replied, and was quite truthful in the reply.

"You are terrible unfilial, my dear!" cried Mrs. Massarene. "What tens of thousands there is as would give their souls to be in your shoes."

"Possibly," said Katherine with fatigue. The opinions she had expressed to Lord Framlingham in India were still hers, unaltered, indeed strengthened, by all which she had seen in English society since her return to her parents' house.

She often thought of the walk across the frozen fields to Greater Thrope, and when once or twice she saw Hurstmanceaux when riding, or at the opera, she felt a sense of shame burn in her heart and warm her cheeks which it required all her serenity and self-control to restrain from outward evidence.

"The hangman's daughter!" she said to herself, recalling the speech she had overheard at Bedlowes. "Oh, how right he was!"

When he saw her he bowed to her gravely and courteously, but never attempted to approach her.

"My dear child, if you rile your father he won't leave you nothing," said Margaret Massarene, in her emotion forgetting the syntax of her new sphere.

"So be it," said Katherine; "but why do you speak of him as so sure to die before me? He is a very strong man and he is only fifty-seven."

"My dear," whispered her mother in sepulchral tones, "'tis true he's a very strong man, but the cooking 'll kill him before his time, to say nothing of other things. Look ye, Kathleen, a man works like a horse and lives like an ox all the best of his years, just beef and bread and bacon and beer, and them only taken in snacks, just to keep the body going. Then all at once, when he's made his pile, he says, says he, 'Now I'll stuff,' and he eats like ten princes rolled in one and drinks in proportion, because he's made his money and why shouldn't he spend it? And he forgets as he's a liver, and he forgets as he ain't as young as he used to be, and he forgets as the fatted hog would die of fat if the butcher didn't stick him first."

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With which homely illustration she sighed heavily and patted her smart gown in a melancholy reverie.

"I dare say you are right," said her daughter. "But if my father were temperate by force of will so very long, is it not strange that temperance should not have become his habit, too strong a habit to be ever broken?"

Her mother shook her head.

"I don't suppose, my dear, you've watched pigs in the styes and out; I have. They'll put up with bran when they must, but lord, if they get out amongst the clams and the yams, twist their tails as you will they'll ne'er leave off. When a man's made his pile he's just like a pig in a sweet potato patch."

With which apologue she sighed again and rose to go and dress for her daily drive behind those immensely tall and always-prancing horses, who always seemed to her as the winged beasts of the Apocalypse.

"And as for temperance," she said as she paused in the doorway, "well, my dear, 'tisn't temperate as I'd call any man out West. Your father could drink deep like the rest; but he had always a very strong head; a very strong head indeed, my dear."

Was his strong head being turned by Lady Kenilworth? his daughtered wondered. Would the brain which had never grown dizzy over the poisoned drinks and the delirious speculations of America be whirled out of its orbit by that which is the most intoxicating thing in all creation—a lovely woman who is also a woman of the world? She believed that Lady Kenilworth would do precisely what she pleased with him. Did not she and her roulette wheel reign in triumph even in the arcana of Harrenden House? As far as a woman who is essentially honorable, candid, and single-minded can follow the moves and read the mind of one who is entirely without those qualities, she understood the character and the circumstances of her father's *veneris victrix*. She had asked Framlingham what his opinion was of her and he had answered: "I never say anything but good of a woman, my dear; but if I had the choice between seeing one of my sons enamored of her, or shot by his own hand, I should choose the revolver, as less prejudicial to his reputation than the lady."

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She was very sensible that her position as the daughter of the house did not permit her in any way to show her own disapprobation of one of its favored guests. She knew also that nothing she could have said or have done would have ever moved her father a hair's breadth. She remained strictly passive and neutral, but to all the advances of Hurstmanceaux's sister she was adamant; and now and then a caustic hint or phrase escaped her; usually when she saw her mother treated with unconcealed contempt by the lady of her father's idolatry.

"I am going on to the Duchess of Parminster's reception; are you?" said Mrs. Massarene one evening, satisfied that this time, at least, she was saying the right thing.

"Old Par's Zoo? Not if I know it," said Mouse, in her brusquest tone, and, turning her shoulder on her unfortunate interlocutor, resumed her interrupted flirtation.

"There is no play at the Parminsters," said Katherine Massarene in a tone, low, but so clear that Mouse reddened angrily, and several persons near smiled indiscreetly, despite themselves.

Mrs. Massarene went crestfallen to her carriage.

If a duchess, daughter, wife, and mother of dukes, was not a distinguished acquaintance, who was? And if a party gathered together to meet princes could be called a menagerie, where was salvation to be found? She was a meek woman, used to endure bullying with patience, but now and then her bile would rise, as she expressed it, under the insolence of that lovely lady who yet exercised over her the fascination of the brilliant-coated snake for the humble barndoor hen.

She resented, but she dare not rebel. She went to the assembly at Parminster House sorely exercised in her mind and vaguely wondering what could be amiss with a courtly crowd, in which the first person she saw was her future sovereign, who had dined there.

"Well, *he* comes because there are certain dishes they do so remarkably well in this house," said Daddy Gwyllian, of whom she asked for information, as he took her to have an ice. "But Lady Kenny wouldn't trouble herself to show here; it's not her style; it's deadly respectable.

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You see she's too young to bore herself at present for the sake of a sauce."

Mrs. Massarene sighed and reflected that the study of society was a service which required to be learned very young.

Mouse felt herself read and understood by Billy's daughter, and she did not like it. When she dined at Harrenden House or made them give a ball there, the evenings were spoiled to her by the sense that those large, calm, dark violet eyes of the young woman of the house were upon her and all her doings.

Who would ever have supposed that such a cockatrice's egg of irony and insolence could have been laid and hatched in such a nest of respectful subserviency as was Harrenden House?

The air, the manner, the style, even the glance of this young woman were odious to her; the idea of Billy's daughter daring to be cold and distant to herself, and pretending to be a gentlewoman in her own right! What possible business had a young woman, so born, to arched insteps, beautiful hands, and a low melodious voice? The thing was preposterous! "Born in a garret, in a kitchen bred," her natural sphere the still-room or the laundry, how could she venture to carry herself with dignity at a Drawing-room, and answer patronage with cold disdain?

"I really think," she reflected, "that she must be a natural daughter of Framlingham's, whom he has got the Massarenes to adopt. She has just his caustic way of saying things, and it would account for her going to India."

This fable seemed so satisfactory to her that she whispered it to one or two persons, who in turn whispered it to two or three others, till it became generally whispered and believed, and was indeed only not heard by the persons whom it immediately concerned, and who alone could have disproved it.

"But if she's old Billy's heiress, it don't matter a pin whose daughter she was?" said Brancepeth, with admirable common sense, the kind of common sense which is a conspicuous trait of youth at the end of this century.

And it was the general sentiment.

This story came to the ears of Hurstmanceaux.

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"Who told you?" he said to the lady who prattled it to him.

"Mouse," the lady hastened to say. "It is because it came from her that I believed it."

He went to his sister.

"I hear you are the originator of a story that Miss Massarene is the daughter of Framlingham. What authority have you for such a statement?"

She laughed a little.

"Oh, I don't know! I think so——"

"You think so. Is that all?"

"Well, yes, I suppose it is. But I am quite sure of it."

"On what grounds?"

"Grounds? What do you mean? It is my idea——"

"Ah! it is your idea. And for such ideas, when they are spoken or written, there is a legal phraseology and a legal punishment."

She looked at him startled, but amused.

"What can you possibly mean? One can say anything one pleases."

"If it be not libel. This is. You will do well to contradict the report you have set afloat."

"Goodness, Ronald! How odd you are! You won't even know these people. What can it matter to you whether they are talked of or not?"

"It matters nothing to me. But it matters much to me that you should invent and circulate falsehoods, and try to injure by them an entirely blameless person."

"Meaning Katherine Massarene?"

"Certainly, meaning Miss Massarene."

She laughed, much diverted.

"Are you changing your mind about her?"

"In no way. But she is a person who conducts herself admirably in a most difficult and odious position, and I do not choose to allow you to circulate inventions which may ultimately injure her extremely. You will remember that some time ago I made you retract a calumny; I shall act in the same way now unless you, of your accord, can completely withdraw this tale you have set about."

She was silent.

She remembered how unpleasant he had been when she

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had fabricated a pretty web of falsehoods concerning one of her acquaintances, actually forcing her to apologize to all the people concerned.

"I can't imagine why you should care," she said sullenly.

"To care for abstract justice is quite unintelligible to you," he answered. "It is to most people. Will you retract this lie or will you not?"

"You make a storm in a teacup. What will you do if I don't?"

"I shall tell your friend Mr. Massarene how you return his hospitalities, and I shall make you confess your inventions."

"How horrid you are, Ronald!" she said, while her lips quivered, partly with fear and partly with rage. "You won't look at the young woman, and yet you set your back up like this. Oh, of course I can tell people that I was only joking. But it will be very disagreeable."

"You should bridle your tongue," said Hurstmanceaux sternly, surprised himself to feel with what extreme irritation this story of hers had awakened in him. He could not and would not know Massarene's heiress, but he admired her conduct in society; he admired most of all what others condemned in her, the contemptuous coldness and indifference of her manner, her brief replies, sometimes so cutting and caustic, her avoidance of all those whose high position made them sought by her parents, the unwavering coldness with which she resented all court paid to her.

When he watched her in the world, he felt inclined to applaud as he would have applauded a fine innings at Lord's or a hard-won race on the Thames. It seemed to him monstrous that his sister, because her matrimonial schemes had failed, should pursue with slander anyone so innocent and so much to be praised.

William Massarene was in no haste to marry his daughter. His vanity would have impelled him to give her an unusual dower if she had married, and he did not care to cut so huge a slice out of his capital. Moreover, his ambitions, growing by what they fed on, became inordinate. No alliance seemed to him great enough.

Besides, he thought often, the old woman might go to

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glory, and he might marry again and have sons. To his strength of purpose and vastness of reach the future—his future—seemed illimitable.

She received a homage which nauseated, a flattery which disgusted, her. She knew that she was seen through the golden haze of her father's reputation for wealth. "If I were deaf, or blind, or crooked," she thought, "if I were diseased, or imbecile, or mutilated, there would not be one the less ready to worship and wed me out of all these throngs of wooers." And very often her brief words cut them like a lash, and in her eyes, which were the hue of the darkest purple of a pansy, there came a flash of scorn whose cause those around her were too self-complacent to attribute aright.

She had but one pleasure—that of bringing together great artists, and causing Harrenden House to be renowned for something better than the usual display and expenditure of "new" houses. She had difficulty in making her father pay the singers and musicians as she wished them to be paid, for he who would give two guineas a bottle for a rare Comet-wine, or waste many thousands of pounds in receiving a sporting prince at Vale Royal, grudged their fees to what he contemptuously called "professionals." But when he saw how greatly these musical entertainments "took on," and how much they did to raise the tone of his house, he gave her large credit and discretion, and the reputation for the weekly chamber-music at Harrenden House soon attracted to it those choicer souls whom millions and Richemont could not alone have drawn there.

Sometimes she wished she could invite that lover of music who had listened to the sonata in B flat at Bedlowes. She would sooner have seen him there than his sister, who showed for an hour at these concerts, and then took herself off to some gayer form of entertainment.

"It is intensely classic and correct, but deadly dull," said Lady Kenilworth, although she was, on occasion, a musical composer herself, and wrote little songs which, with many corrections and additions from Delkass and other salon-singers and fashionable pianists, passed muster and were published as her own.

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Once, to please her, Massarene bade his daughter have one of these ballads sung at the next Harrenden House concert.

"My dear father, get someone else to manage these things," she answered. "Or let us give them up altogether. But bad amateur music I will not have sung or played whilst I am responsible for the selection."

She was quite resolute on the point, and, as he did not wish concerts which were so admired to be abandoned, he could not please his idol in this matter.

"She says your songs ain't good enow, my lady," he announced grimly, with that relish in annoying her which occasionally overcame his submissiveness, at such times as he remembered the diplomatist and the Bird rooms, or saw a bevy of men round her as she donned her evening cloak.

The announcement did not lessen the impatient aversion which she felt for his heiress.

"Are you afraid of your own daughter, Billy?" she asked very contemptuously.

"I ain't afraid of nobody," said Mr. Massarene; and there was an ugly look for a moment on his face.

"What an odious man he was!" she thought. "What a lout, what a bore, and, no doubt, what a bully too where he could be so!"

Sometimes a gleam of good sense made her afraid of him; afraid of all the obligations which she was under to him; afraid of some future reprisal he might take for all her insolence. But she was utterly careless and extremely imprudent, and she dismissed the fear as soon as it assailed her.

"You don't marry your daughter, Billy," she said one day. "It was very provoking that the affair with my brother went off as it did."

"It was never on that I am aware on," said William Massarene stiffly, with a look like that of a displeased bull on his face.

"Well, no, of course it wasn't. Ronald wouldn't know you. I'm afraid, my good Billy, there'll be people who won't know you to the very end of your day."

He looked more displeased still, but he was accustomed to bear her insolence patiently.

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"Every man has his price, they say," he answered doggedly. "Seems as I haven't hit on Lord Hurstmanceaux's."

He did not venture to say to her that he was delighted her project had failed.

"What funny things you say, Billy," cried Mouse, with a peal of her enchanting laughter.

He was charmed, and began to believe himself a wit.

"I'm coming to hear you to-night," she added.

He had been asked to speak on the Early Closing Bill; the bill was originally a Conservative measure, and so the Conservative party was obliged to support it in its Radical dress. The prospect made him nervous, but he was a man who knew how to control his nerves; and he had that solid sense of his own powers which when it is allied to good sense is the surest of all support. Moreover, Mouse knew exactly how to flatter whilst she bullied him; to flatter him enough, to make him happy, never enough to make herself ridiculous, or her kind words cheap.

"It's darned rot," thought William Massarene. "All this here kind of thing is socialism in disguise. The public is treated like a child, and an idiot child. If it wants shops open late, it'll pay traders to keep 'em open, and if it wants 'em shut early, it won't pay traders to keep 'em open. That's all about it I reckon. 'Tis one of them things that should be left to the public. A trader don't want to sit twiddling his thumbs, and why in hell's name should the Government force him to twiddle his thumbs?"

But this simple common-sense view of the case was not the one taken by the persons he had to support, and so he prepared a very neat speech which argued the case from the opposite point of view to his own.

"Awful rot," he thought, as he jotted down the heads of it. "But this old country takes the cake for rot."

Naturally, he did not care a straw which way the votes went; the time had long gone by when he had kept a shop, and even the time when he had owned many shops with dummy names over their doors and dummy proprietors returned in the census; and whether Islington, and Notting Hill, and Camden Town, and Bethnal Green

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burned gas till midnight, or shut up at twilight, did not matter the least to him.

She had prophesied his success in the House, and he soon justified her prophecy. He spoke on questions of home-legislation, and spoke well, in short but telling sentences without nervousness, but with apparent modesty; to be sure, there was the drawback of his accent, which was at once plebeian and Yankee, but of this he was himself unconscious, and the time is passed when the House of Commons exacted either education or elegance; it has heard so many dialects and dropped aspirates within the last twenty years that its ear has grown deaf to such offences. What he had to say seemed to him, in its matter, very poor trash, but he said it well; and a sense that this stout, uncouth, unpleasant person would be a tower of strength in their ranks spread itself downward from their chief throughout all the ranks of the Conservative party, and made them feel that they had better not call him Billy too often.

He was too sagacious a man to be tempted to speak on subjects out of his range of special knowledge; on those of which he had such knowledge, stocks, mining, railways, or finance, he spoke rarely, but with admirable practical astuteness; the House saw that he was an authority not to be despised. In smart society he was embarrassed and ill at ease and conscious of his own deficiences; but with men on public matters, he was neither daunted nor dazzled. He had a very poor opinion of the House of Commons, whether as a talking-shop or a manager of public business, and he felt nothing of the awe which is popularly supposed to be inspired in all new members by the sight of the Speaker's Mace.

He had quickly taken the measure of the Assembly, and he was not afraid of it. He thought it a very poor affair; wasting all its time in jaw, and timidly endeavoring to conciliate the masses, which, to his knowledge, were best governed with a stock-whip and a six-shooter. But he was too shrewd to let his private opinion leak out; and he contented himself with making both sides of the House feel that a man had come amongst them who, if they liked to listen to them, could teach them the time of day on

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all subjects which concerned practical politics and the business side of government.

The Irish members loathed him because he had turned his back on Ireland instead of consecrating his millions to leagues and dynamite. But on the rest of the House the impression he made was favorable. After all, a politician who has Richemont at the head of his kitchen, and gives you the great wines of comet years, is a superior companion on the benches to the Nonconformist schoolmaster, the hungry barrister, or the professor full of crotchets, whom Northern England or Eastern London sends to St. Stephen's.

"Really, Billy, you got on very well," said Mouse, who had come to the speaker's box to hear him; that little box is much more comfortable than the Lady's Gallery.

"'Twas all soft sawder," said Mr. Massarene, with grim contempt.

She was standing in the corridor twisting a lace wrap round her head, and he had come upstairs after the division to receive her congratulations and take her orders.

"What I'd like to teach 'em is how to do the business of this 'ere House. Why, if any private business was carried on for half a year as the business of the nation's done by these gentlemen, there'd be an almighty smash such as somebody'd go in the docks for——"

"Tell the House so," said Mouse, much diverted.

He puffed out his cheeks, which was his equivalent for a smile.

"Guess, my lady, 'tain't the place for truth-telling."

"You should have gone to the other side."

He shook his head.

"Not me, my lady. What do the Radicals say to me? This is what they say: 'My good fellow, you've earned five shillin's by sweatin' all day; hand it over here, will ye. We want to buy beer and beefsteaks for Tom, Dick, and Harry, who've been sittin' loafin' on a wall over there while you was workin'.' No Radicals for me if I know it."

"You are very delightful, Billy," said his patroness, "and you may come with us to supper at the Papillons Club. I'm dreadfully hungry, though I have only been

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'loafin'' behind a grating. I've made rendezvous there with Carrie."

He obeyed the permission of his enchantress; and meekly ate some oysters and drank some champagne in company with her and a dozen of her gayest associates; it occurred to no one of them to pay the bill, and the head waiter took it discreetly to the master of Harrenden House when no one else was looking.

The Papillons was a new and very fashionable supper club, much resorted to after the opera, the theatres, and parliamentary debates.

He felt that it was a place too full of gaiety, frivolity, and youth to be a meet place for a member of parliament and a Crœsus of his age and his ambitions. He thought suppers apoplectical, champagnes, even *brùt*, very poor stuff, and English oysters ridiculous; nevertheless, he went, and was rewarded by seeing his enchantress toss the liliputian bivalves down her rosy throat and turn her shoulder on him as she had done on his wife.

To be sure, he had the privilege of paying the bill, a privilege which he found the English aristocracy always willing to concede to him.

"There'll always be people too proud to know me, will there?" he thought, as he drove homeward; "but I guess there'll never be people too proud to let me pay for 'em."

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CHAPTER XVIII.

THE giddy months frolicked away like youths and maidens dancing on a golden ground on one of Povis de Chavanne's friezes. Flirting, laughing, gaming, waltzing, shooting, hunting, driving, dressing—above all dressing—the seasons succeeded each other with breathless rapidity for Mouse Kenilworth, and hundreds of fair women like her.

Money grew scarcer, credit grew rarer, Billy became less easy to bleed, Harry seemed to grow duller and less good-looking, cabmen became shyer still of Cocky, and the old duke more unwilling to sign and sell; but she still all the same enjoyed herself, still carried high her golden head, and still crammed forty-eight hours into every twenty-four. Occasionally she did a little philanthropy; inaugurated a railway line, visited some silk mills, or laid the stone of a church. The silver barrow she received made a pretty flower-stand, the pieces of silk offered to her were also useful in their way, and when she had opened a church she felt she had a dispensation for months from attending church services. Only Egypt she could not manage this year. Egypt is a pastime which requires a good deal of ready money, and she had to console herself with hunting in the Midlands and shooting rocketers in the damp English woods; she did not really care about shooting, but she found zest in it because Ronald and the old duke hated the idea of women killing things, and even Brancepeth disapproved it.

She went down again more than once to Vale Royal and went out with the hounds to whose maintenance her host had subscribed so liberally. But in February a long black frost sent hunters to their straw and riders up to town, and she opened her house in Stanhope Street as the session opened at Westminster. She had the children up also; partly because she was really fond of them, partly because children *poser* you, and touch the heart and the purse-strings of your relatives.

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She disliked the town in winter; she wanted to be in Cairo or at Monte Carlo or Rome; but, being in London, she made the best of it and took her graceful person to any place where she thought she could be amused. There are many dinners in London when the frost binds the country in its iron bonds and the horses champ and fret in their stalls, and the herons starve by the frozen streams, and the dead kingfishers lie like crumpled heaps of broken iris-flowers on the cruel ice of their native ponds.

"Has Billy run dry?" asked her lord one day when their financial difficulties were pressing more hardly than usual, and an unpaid cabman had threatened Bow Street.

"No," said Mouse curtly. "But the young woman is always there. She's as sharp as a needle."

"Why didn't you splice her to Ronnie?"

"He won't even look at her."

"How exactly like him!" said Cocky. "If there's a thing he might do to oblige one he always kicks at it."

Hurstmanceaux always seemed to them odiously unfeeling and huffy; nevertheless, as they always did in their troubles, they sent to him to come and speak to them one day when their creditors had been more offensive than usual. He was so rarely in town that they agreed it was only prudent to take advantage of his being there for a week or two on account of evidence he had to give before a House of Lords Committee on an Irish land question.

What Daddy Gwyllian had said once in the smoking-room at Otterbourne House, and had more than once since then repeated, dwelt in Hurstmanceaux's memory, and made him doubt whether it was indeed worth while to go on impoverishing himself for people who had neither gratitude nor scruple.

After all, if the Duke of Otterbourne's eldest son went into the Bankruptcy Court, it was the Duke of Otterbourne's affair.

It would be cruelly hard on Otterbourne, who was himself one of the most upright, honorable and conscientious of gentlemen. But it would be still harder on himself, Hurstmanceaux, after his long self-denial and self-sacrifice to find himself in Queer Street for sake of his brother-in-law, a brother-in-law whom he considered, in his own

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forcible language, not fit to be touched with a pair of tongs.

If they would only retire awhile and retrench they could pull themselves together. Cocky had an estate in the west of Ireland, entirely unsaleable for the best of reasons that nobody would buy it, but which Hurstmanceaux considered a very heaven upon earth, for its views of land and sea were sublime, and its myrtle and bay thickets, its pine and cork woods, had almost the beauty of Cintra with the vast billows of the Atlantic rolling on the rocky shores at their feet. If they would go to this place, called Black *Hazel*, and live there for a few years, their affairs would come round, and Mouse would be taken out of that vicious circle of unending expenditure and compromising expedient in which women of the world turn like squirrels in a cage.

To the innocence of this simple masculine mind it seemed quite possible that if such a course were suggested to her she would follow it. She was fond of the children; Black Hazel would be a paradise for them; she liked sport—Black Hazel offered quail, woodcock, blackcock, teal in abundance, and both fresh water and deep sea fishing to any extent.

He enumerated its attractions enthusiastically to himself as if he were an auctioneer endeavoring to sell the estate, and, with the *naïveté* of an honest man, imagined that after all his sister could only need to have her duty clearly shown her to do it.

"The finest thoroughbred mare will chew dry reeds when she finds she can't get hay or oats," he thought, his mind reverting to his memories of the Egyptian campaign, which he had shared in as an amateur. The brother of Lady Kenilworth should have known that women of the world are more "kittle cattle" than even blood-mares; but he did not realize this.

He knew that she was unreasonable, wildly extravagant, very selfish, and so accustomed to have her own way that she thought the stars would pause in their courses to please her; but still, even she would stop short of absolute social suicide, he thought.

So when next he received a note from his sister asking

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him to come to her on a matter of importance, which always with her meant money, he took his way to the conference determined to tell her frankly that the retreat to the west of Ireland was the only possible refuge for her, and to keep well in his memory the sensible warning and counsel of Daddy Gwyllian.

When he got to the house in Stanhope Street he found Cocky waiting to see him before he went out. This fact alone was ominous and extremely disagreeable to him, the presence of Cocky, in his wife's morning-room, invariably indicating not only that money was wanted, which was chronic, but that some more than usually unpleasant dilemma had to be met.

Cocky's paper was all over the place, as he would have expressed it; and very often in hands so disreputable that its rescue was a matter as compromising as it was costly.

When he was walking about amongst the china and the trinkets, and the flowers and the lacquer work, with his thin pale aquiline profile against the light, and the Blenheims barking furiously at him as they invariably did, his presence was the certain sign of something impending which might get with most odious prominence into the newspapers.

"If he's forged anybody's name, I only hope to heavens that it's only mine," thought Hurstmanceaux: he always expected Cocky to come to forgery sooner or later. In point of fact, Cocky had come to it very early in his career, as early as his Eton days, when he had been ducked in the river by the comrade with whose name he had taken such liberties.

With his hands in his trowser pockets and his little frail person flitting amongst the chinoiseries and the heaths and orchids, he peered up at this moment at Hurstmanceaux where he stood on the hearth, very tall, very stern, very unsympathetic, and absolutely silent.

"What a glum brute he is," Cocky thought of the man to whom he had owed his own social salvation a score of times. "What an uncommon nasty thing human nature must be that it must always look so deuced unpleasant whenever it finds anybody in trouble."

Cocky was of opinion that it was the first duty of other

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men to pick himself out of the mud whenever he got into it, and that it should not only be the duty of his neighbors but their pleasure.

"Such a hard-hearted brute is Ronnie," he thought. "Only lives for himself and don't spend sixpence a day. I do hate selfishness and stinginess."

The Blenheims at this instant scampered into the room, and flew at his ankles with that strong disapproval of him which they never failed to show.

"Oh Lord, you little beasts!" he cried, as their shrill voices rent the air.

Hurstmanceaux looked on in grim approval of the dogs' discrimination, whilst his brother-in-law wasted kicks in all directions, the Blenheims avoiding them with the happiest dexterity and returning undaunted to the charge.

The entrance of their mistress effected a diversion in the warfare and relaxed the contemptuous sternness of her brother's face.

"So kind of you, dear Ronnie," she said sweetly as she came up to him softly and brought a sense of fragrance and freshness, like a dewy rose, as she came straight from her bath and its opponax soap and eau de verveine.

"They've torn my trowsers," said Cocky, looking down at the marks of their small sharp teeth upon frayed cloth.

"You know they dislike you," said his wife coldly. "Why do you provoke them?"

"Hang it all, I'm their master," murmured Cocky, eyeing his ankles ruefully.

"Oh, dear no, you are not," said Mouse very uncivilly; "I never taught them to think so for a moment."

"If you only sent for me to hear you quarrel over the ownership of the Blenheims——" said Hurstmanceaux. He was angry; he had to attend a Royal Commission at two o'clock, and he wanted to be instead on the river, watching the practice of the Eton eight of which his youngest brother was captain. And here he was, shut up at half-past twelve with two bickering people and two barking lap-dogs, with the prospect of hearing for an hour of debts and difficulties which he had neither the power nor the will to meet or dissipate. "Pray let me hear the worst at once," he added. "Is it the Old Bailey, or only

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the Bankruptcy Court, that Cocky is going to show himself in this time to an admiring society?"

His sister looked at him and saw that he was not in a pleasant mood; but she did not mind his moods, they always ended in giving her what she wanted. He was an intrinsically generous and compassionate man, and such tempers are always kindly to their own hurt.

"Damned ungrateful fellow he is!" reflected Cocky. "As if there wasn't *one* Court that he ought to bless me for never going into."

But he said nothing aloud, and left the recital of their difficulties to his wife.

She plunged immediately into the narrative of their woes and needs, the Blenheims, reduced to silence through want of breath, sitting with their tongues out and their heads on one side, listening attentively as though they were two auditors in bankruptcy.

Hurstmanceaux listened also in an unsympathetic silence which to his companions seemed to bode no good to themselves. There was nothing new in the relation; debts have seven-leagued boots, as every one knows, and people who spend a few thousands every year in railway journeys, but do not pay their tailor, shoemaker, and greengrocer, realize this with unpleasant frequency. Then there were debts of honor in all directions, these being the only form of honor which was left to the delinquents as Hurstmanceaux thought, but charitably forebode to say.

He looked at his sister whilst she spoke, admiring her appearance whilst he scarcely attended to her words because he knew their import beforehand so painfully well. What a terribly expensive animal was a modern woman of the world! As costly as an ironclad and as complicated as a theatrophone. The loveliest product of an entirely artificial state, but the most ruinous, and the most irritating to those whom she ruined.

He told himself that Daddy Gwyllian had been entirely right. And he hardened his heart against this beautiful apparition which with dewy lips, perfumed hair, and a delicious suggestion of a nymph fresh from a waterbrook, stood before him in that charming attitude of contrition

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and candor with which from her nursery days he had always known her tell her very largest lies.

"So all the dirt you've eaten hasn't done you any good," he said curtly, after some minutes of silence.

"What can you possibly mean?" said Mouse.

Cocky chuckled feebly. He knew what his brother-in-law meant.

"We can't bleed Billy every day," he murmured in an explanatory tone.

"You seem to think you can bleed your father and myself whenever you please," said Hurstmanceaux in his most incisive tones.

"Lord, what else is one's family for?" said Cocky candidly.

His wife looked with impatience at the clock, for she had appointments which were agreeable.

"Really, I think we've told you everything," she said to her brother. "It is not nice of you to insult us in our troubles, but I am sure you mean to help us in the end, don't you, Ronnie?"

"I am extremely sorry," said Hurstmanceaux. "But it is wholly out of my power to help you this time. Your debts are enormous. The only possible chance for you is to give up London life, and life in the world altogether, and go and retrench in the country. Why not at Black Hazel? It would be admirable for the children; and your creditors, if they knew you were really economizing, could probably be induced to wait. I see no other prospect possible."

"Don't be a fool, Ronald," said his sister curtly, throwing her handkerchief rolled in a ball to the dogs.

Her husband stared through his eyeglass. "Ah—er—I thought you would make some practical suggestion; something feasible, you know!"

Hurstmanceaux frowned.

"So I do. When people are in your position they always withdraw to their Black Hazel or whatever their retreat is called. They don't go on living in the world. Black Hazel is a delightful place. It will be much better than a second floor in Florence, or a boarding house in

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Dresden, which many people come to who are in your plight."

His sister looked at her watch.

"My dear Ronald, I have no more time to spare you," she said rather insolently. "And if you can suggest nothing more sensible than a second floor in Florence, or a bog in Ireland, I shall lose little by not hearing anything more that you may have to say."

"I have given you my opinion and my advice," said Hurstmanceaux stiffly. "You can live at Black Hazel tolerably well, and in a way becoming your position; the air is very fine and the children will thrive admirably. But if you persist in continuing your present rate of expenditure——"

His sister opened the door and disappeared, calling the Blenheims with her.

"Lord, excuse me, Ronnie, but why do you talk that rot?" said her husband, peering up through his glasses at his brother-in-law. "What on earth is the use of going on in that way to her? Out o' London? Down in the west of Ireland? Your sister and me? Oh, Lord!"

The idea of his exile from "life" so tickled his fancy that he laughed till he choked himself.

"Black Hazel! Mouse and I and her chicks at Black Hazel! Oh, good Lord, Ronnie! You won't beat that if you try for a week o' Sundays!"

He chuckled feebly but merrily.

"What is there to laugh at?" said Hurstmanceaux. "Is the Bankruptcy Court more agreeable than a country place which is your own and where you will be your own master?"

But Cocky continued to laugh convulsively, holding his side and coughing.

From his great height Hurstmanceaux looked down in scorn on the speaker.

"Pray," he said coldly, "do you ever ask how your wife gets the ready money she has to carry on with?"

Kenilworth shook his head.

"Not I. Mutual what do-ye-call it and non-interference is the only sound basis for domestic peace."

He spoke with an expression of implicit seriousness and

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good faith; only his left eye winked knowingly, as if he had said something very amusing indeed. Hurstmanceaux wondered if it would be within decent manners to kick one's brother-in-law on his own hearth.

"You are an unutterable scoundrel, Cocky," he said, with an effort mastering his impulse to use acts instead of words.

Kenilworth remained unmoved.

"That's libel. A beak would fine you a fiver for it," he said placidly. "Do you happen to have got a fiver about you?"

"Go and ask Brancepeth for one," said Hurstmanceaux, white with rage.

"Oh, Lord!" said the other innocently. "I've had *his* last ages ago. He is a very poor devil is Harry, a very poor devil, else we shouldn't be in this strait."

Hurstmanceaux approached him so closely that Cocky, whose nerves were skaken by much absinthe and angostura, trembled.

"I would sooner my sister were on the pavement of the Haymarket than that she were the wife of such a cur as you."

Cocky breathed more freely.

"That is a very exaggerated remark," he murmured. "You are so very stagy, my dear Ronald, so very stagy. You should have lived a century or two ago."

"I am ashamed to be of the same generation as yourself," said Hurstmanceaux sternly. "Great heavens, man! You come of a good stock; you will be chief of a great house; your father is a gentleman in every fibre of his being; how can you endure to live as you do with your very name a byword for the cabmen in the street? There is not a servant in your house, not a match seller on your area steps, not a stableboy in your mews, who does not know the dishonor which you alone affect to ignore! She is my sister, I am ashamed to say; but I can do nothing with her so long as you, her husband, condone and countenance what she does. You have every power; I have none. Take her to Black Hazel, sacrifice yourself for sake of your children, shut yourself up there, try and lead a cleanly life and make her lead an honest one.

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Cease to be the miserable thing you are—a diseased maggot living on putrefaction?"

Kenilworth listened imperturbably. To be likened to a diseased maggot did not distress him; it slightly diverted him in its appositeness.

"The children?" he said softly and slowly. "You really think I ought to consider those children?"

His pale, expressionless grey eyes, becoming suddenly full of unutterable depth of expression, looked up into his brother-in-law's and said volumes without words.

Hurstmanceaux grew red to the roots of his bright curly hair. After all, the woman spoken of, if this man's wife, was his own sister, his favorite sister, the little one whom he had carried about in his arms when a boy, up and down the tapestried galleries and the oak staircases of the dear old house at Faldon.

Kenilworth saw that emotion and despised it, but thought he would profit by it and do a bit of dignity.

"My dear Ronnie," he said almost seriously, "if I had married another sort of woman than your sister Clare, I might have become a different sort of man. It is not likely; still, it is possible. But, you may believe me, if she had married the best man under heaven, she would have been just exactly what she is. Sages and angels wouldn't alter her. Don't you fret yourself about us. We aren't worth it—I grant that. We are of our time, and we shall get along somehow. Ta-ta, Ronnie; you are a good boy. Be grateful that I am what I am; if I were like you, *vieux jeu*, what a bother I should have made for our respective families long ago in the D. C."

And with a low complacent chuckle at having got the best of the argument, he dived under his seat for his hat, glanced at the clock, and, with an apologetic gesture of two fingers, left Hurstmanceaux alone in the morning-room with the chinoiseries and nipponisériés.

"Now his conscience will work and make him miserable," he thought, as he went across the hall with satisfaction. "After all, I said the truth, and he knows it is the truth. She is his sister, and she's a bad a lot as there is in London, and he'll feel he owes me something, and he'll come down handsomely, stingy old bloke though he is. What

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duffers those sentiment men always are to be sure. How neat I handled him. Gad, if he didn't blush like a girl!"

And Cocky stepped lightly down Park Lane to Hamilton Place and entered the Bachelors Club "fancying himself very much," as he would have expressed it; and quite aware that his strategy would end sooner or later in an interview more or less agreeable to his interests between his own lawyers and those of his brother-in-law.

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CHAPTER XIX.

It was another wet and chilly Easter in another year, and the town had just begun to fill after the recess, when one morning after luncheon the good Duke of Otterbourne, as his county called him, riding down the Kensington high road, was thrown from his horse, between whose forelegs a bicycle had staggered and fallen. The boy on the bicycle was but scarcely bruised; the Duke was carried insensible to the nearest pharmacy and never rallied. By four o'clock he was dead; and many persons, men and women, old and young, gentle and simple, felt their eyes wet as the news of his death circulated through the Park and streets.

His daughter-in-law heard of it as she drove in at Hyde Park Corner; a man she knew stopped her carriage and broke the intelligence to her as gently as he could. She was shocked for a moment; then she thought to herself: "We shall have Otterbourne House now, and I suppose there'll be money, at least for a time." Then, as she always studied appearances, she went home decorously and busied herself telegraphing to his family and her own.

The body of the old duke had been already taken to Otterbourne House and laid on his bed in those modest rooms opening on the gardens, to which she had so often desired to limit him. His features were calm and wore a look of peace; his neck had been broken in the fall; it was thought probable that he had suffered nothing, not even a passing pang. Whilst telegrams were being sent all over England, and it grew dusk, she came, clothed in black, and knelt by the low bed, weeping. She always did what was right in small things, and at any moment some member of her family or his might enter the room. Meanwhile messengers of all degrees, servants, grooms, commissionaires, telegraph boys, were rushing to and fro over the metropolis and its environs in their vain search for the Earl of Kenilworth. No one had any idea where Cocky was.

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No one had seen him for two days; his absence was of so slight an account that even his valet never took any heed of it; it was surmised that he was in congenial society.

She was thinking as she knelt of the alterations she would make in the house; the gardens were old-fashioned and would have to be laid out afresh; the circular entrance-hall should be made a *patio* like Frederic Leighton's and have a glass dome; the picture gallery sadly wanted weeding, and the process of weeding might be made lucrative to the weeder, for dealers would buy anything out of Otterbourne House with their eyes shut; the small oval room painted by Angelica Kauffman should be her boudoir. "I sha'n't need to bore myself with Billy," she thought: the duke had not been a rich man and had been impoverished by his sacrifices to assist Cocky; but still things would be very different to the hand-to-mouth life which they led, and which drove her to support the nuisance of Harrenden House and Vale Royal, and similar expedients. The Duchess of Otterbourne would, she reckoned, have a free hand at least for a time; and they would probably be able to sell lots of things despite the entail.

Alberic Orme arrived that night from his country vicarage; he was white, haggard, inexpressibly grieved; he had loved his father dearly.

"Where is my brother?" he asked her.

The two younger sons were away—the one with his ship, the other with his troop—in the Indian Ocean and at the Cape.

"Cocky?" said Cocky's wife. "Oh, they are looking for him. They will find him—in some pot-house!"

And so they did on the following morning.

When messengers in hot haste went flying over London to find his son, and telegrams were being despatched to the lamented duke's country seats and county towns, Cocky was drinking gin and playing poker with half-a-dozen persons, more congenial than distinguished, at a little riverside inn near Marlow, where he had been spending three days lost to the world, but dear at least to the hearts of Radical journalists. When at last he was found, and the fatal accident to his father communicated to him,

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Cocky, who, however drunk he might be, never became a fool, pulled himself together, comprehended the position, and put all the money lying about in his pocket.

"Damned if they'll dare ask a duke for it!" he said to himself with a chuckle, and walked quite steadily to the carriage which had come for him, not casting even a look at his late companions, male or female, who were too awed and astonished, as well as too befumed with various drinks to stop him or even to speak to him.

"I'll have a rattling good time now," he thought, as he drove to the Marlow station. "And I'll divorce her; Lord, what a joke it'll be! Perhaps they won't give it me; I dare say they won't give it me; there's a marplot called the Queen's Proctor; they'll talk of collusion, and she'll bring counter-charges, and all the rest of it; but we'll have the fun all the same, and she won't be able to show her face at Court. They're so damned particular at Court about the people who are found out! So is society: she'll be drummed out of society. Lord, what fun it will be!"

Better even than gin and poker and music-hall singers and shady bookmakers in a village on the Thames.

Whilst his father had lived that fun had been always peremptorily forbidden to him.

"Whatever your wife may have done or shall do, you have forfeited all title to resent it," the old duke had always said to him; "and I will not have my name bespattered with your filth in public."

Wholly unconscious of the dark designs he carried in his sodden but sharp little brains, his wife was almost civil to him when he came into her presence, sobered by the fresh air he had breathed on his return from Marlow. She restrained the Blenheims from attacks on his trousers, and did not make any inquiries as to why he had been missing for fifty-six hours.

He was Cocky, he would always be Cocky, the most wretched little scamp in creation; still he was indisputably Seventh Duke of Otterbourne, and had considerable power to make himself disagreeable.

Out of his presence she enjoyed rapturously the vituperation which society papers and the Radical press

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poured upon him now that he had really become an hereditary legislator.

"They are too funny for anything," she said, tossing a handful of them to Brancepeth. "They must have had detectives after him every hour of his life. How on earth do they know all they do?"

"It's easy enough to know about a man who don't pay his cabman and borrows sovereigns of his valet," replied Brancepeth with equanimity, picking up the scattered news sheets.

"Well, he won't want to borrow sovereigns now," remarked his wife.

"Won't he?" said her friend, with worlds of significance in the simple words. "Oh, Lord, if he ever gets to heaven he'll pawn St. Peter's key!"

"But there'll be lots of money, won't there? And the roc's egg will be mine, won't it?" she asked, for her knowledge of such matters was vague.

"Ask your solicitor," said Brancepeth.

The remains of the late duke were taken down to Staghurst, his principal place, a vast mansion and a vaster park in a southwest county, his sons and daughter accompanying the corpse; his daughter-in-law went also, taking with her Jack and Gerry; in small things she always did what looked well. If you pay in halfpence in that way the world pays you back in guineas.

The funeral took place on the following morning, on a very disagreeable day, with sleet and rain and wind; and the family vault and monuments were in a churchyard which lay fully exposed to the blasts from the east, with great yews overshadowing it and sepulchral figures by Chantrey and Nollekens and Roubiliac, looking grim and grey in the foggy air.

The late duke had many sincere mourners, for he had inspired many warm friendships in his own world, and respect and regard in all classes. Moreover, the large number of persons who in various ways were connected with, or dependent on, the Duke of Otterbourne could not but view with terror the advent to that title of the small, frail, hectic little man, who had so cynical a smile in his pale eyes and so shocking a reputation in the coun-

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try. Gossip, too, had not spared that lovely lady in her graceful crape garments, and the beautiful little boys, whose rosy cheeks were a little less bright than usual, as she led them under the darkling yews and the sombre, weird sculptures of the tombs. The people assembled there, especially the tenantry, peasantry, and servants, all felt that the reign of kindness, straightforwardness, and dignity was over, and that the future before them was one clouded and threatening.

"His new Grace do look a mighty poor chap," said one old laborer to another. "And they do say as his blood's all brandy, and none o' the young uns is his own."

"Hold yer gab, Garge, or they'll hev ye in the lock-up," said his more prudent spouse.

But what the old man said audibly many there present thought.

The ceremony was dreary and tedious; Jack and Gerry were cold and frightened, and everyone else was bored; the clergy alone were, as usual, in all their swelling glory and fussy supremacy, headed by the late duke's brother, Augustus Orme, who was Bishop of Dunwich and Waton-on-the-Naze.

After the funeral, and reading of the will, the local magnates of county and church dispersed, and everyone else returned to London by the four o'clock express except Cocky and his wife. He was chilly, feverish, sleepy, and disinclined to leave the house, and she wanted to look over the collection of historial laces which had belonged to her mother-in-law, which had never seen the light for many years, Otterbourne having always jealously guarded them as the most sacred heirloom. They could not be sold now, but they might be used, in various ways; at the least they would adorn Drawing-room costumes; there was, she knew, a *manteau de cour* which had belonged to Henriette d'Angleterre. She was very fond of lace, and she was still more fond of little *mauvais tours;* she did not forget or forgive many words and acts of the late duke; it was one of those unkind small revenges which were to her pampered taste as cayenne pepper or chutney is to a jaded palate, to unlock the dead lady's Italian cabinets and Indian boxes and sandal-wood

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coffers, and to play havoc with the Spanish point, the English point, the Venetian point, the Chantilly, the Flemish, the Dutch, kerchiefs and collars and aprons and flounces and edgings, all fine and rare, many marked with the arms or badges of famous houses or royal wearers of a vanished time.

The poetic interest of the collection was nothing at all to the present duchess; what mattered to her was the value of it in money, though she could not sell it, and the effect it would have if she wore any of it. She did not herself like old lace, it always looked yellow and dingy; but other people did and envied it, and it would all look very nice at some Loan Collection, and make her friends most agreeably jealous. She passed the afternoon hours over it, and in ransacking all the little drawers and boxes in the various cabinets of what had been the favorite sitting-room of the late duchess. Otterbourne, though he had often given his wife cause for jealousy, had been profoundly attached to her and had kept this room untouched, even unentered, except to be swept, dusted, and aired.

Mouse knew this well enough—she had often been irritated at this room being locked against her; but her knowledge did not prevent her pillaging it any more than the sanctity of a church or a mosque to its pious devotees prevents soldiers from sacking and firing it. She had nothing to do, this rainy, chilly, dull day, and the examination of her mother-in-law's relics and treasures served to pass the time; her second maid aided her, a sagacious and discreet young woman, who knew when to use her eyes and when to close them.

The poor dead duchess's room was the cosiest and cheeriest in the whole huge building of Staghurst, which was an immense, uninteresting, last-century house built by Bonnani, and with a fire burning on its long-cold hearth, and a dozen wax-candles lighted in its silver sconces, it was a warm, comfortable, pleasant place for a chilly evening. She had a nice succulent little dinner served there, and when she had done full justice to it returned to her examination of the Japanese cabinets and the Indian boxes and the sandal-wood coffers.

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What sentimental creatures men are, she thought, seeing a bouquet of flowers, which had been dead five-and-twenty years, still left untouched in their porcelain bowl in which the water had long been dry. If ever there was a male flirt, poor Poodle had been one, and yet he had cherished such a solemn *culte* for his dead wife that he had kept her morning-room like a temple for a quarter of a century! It seemed to her very droll.

The little boys came to bid her good-night, and she gave them some *marrons glacés* and kissed them and sent them away. She was impatient to go on with her examination of her late mother-in-law's possessions before anyone could interrupt her, for she did not know at all who had the legal right to them.

Jack's brilliant eyes under their long lashes roved over the room and espied the suggestive confusion of it.

"She's been lootin'," he thought; he knew what looting was; Harry had told him.

"P'rhaps these was looted too," he thought, gazing down on his handful of Paris chestnuts.

He was a very honest little man; he was honest by nature, and Harry had made him so on principle; he had never seen his friend "dedful angy" save once, when he, Jack, had taken a large, sweet, crescent-shaped cake off a stall in the Promenade des Sept Heures at Spa.

His mother had no such qualms; she continued her investigations.

There were things which would have touched some women. There were the love letters of Otterbourne, then Lord Kenilworth, ardent, tender, and graceful, tied up with faded ribbon. There were innocent little notes written by Cocky in a big round hand between pencilled lines beginning "my darling mama." There were baby shoes in pale blue kid and pale pink satin, of which the little wearers had died in infancy. There were diaries, very simple, very brief, not always perfectly well spelled, but always full of affectionate records and entreating prayers of which her husband and her children were the objects. But these things did not move the present occupier of the title and of the room; she pitched them all

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into a heap with no very gentle touch and cast the heap upon the fire. Old rubbish was best burned!

Just as she had done so and was assailed by an unpleasant misgiving that somebody might make a row about the destruction of these things (for everybody was so foolish and sentimental), she heard the voice of Cocky's body-servant speaking at the door to her maid, and the maid approached her with a rather astonished face.

"If you please, your Grace, his Grace is unwell: could you go to his room a moment, madam?"

"Go to his room?"

She was as astonished as her maid. Cocky must be very ill indeed if she were summoned to him. His chronic maladies, due to brandies and sodas and insomnia, were never even named to her. He had certainly coughed and shivered at the funeral that forenoon, and in the train the day before, but then he so often did this no one attached any importance to a little more of it or a little less.

This time, however, poor Cocky, over whom Providence (or the powers of darkness) did not watch as they ought to have done, had caught something worse than a cold, standing without a hat so long in that biting March morning, in a damp and windy country churchyard, and without a drop of anything inside him, as he pathetically remarked.

In the evening he was so unwell with shivering, difficulty of breathing, and pains in his head and limbs, that he could not even drink liquors and enjoy the newspaper attacks upon himself in his own rooms, but had to go to bed at ten o'clock, which he had certainly never done since his early boyhood.

"Most unlucky beast in all creation I am," he muttered as he shivered between the sheets. "Just got the ribbons between my fingers and ten to one the coach'll land in a ditch; ditch we must all end in, eh? Worms and winding sheet and all; even Mouse'll come to that some time. Here, you, get me some brandy and don't stand staring, you fool."

But his valet was no fool, and instead of bringing the brandy went to another wing of the house for the doctor,

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who had always lived in it for many years as attendant on the deceased duke.

The doctor found the new duke in a very sad state of health, with some fever and a hacking cough, which threatened to become pleuro-pneumonia and would try the slender amount of strength which the sick man possessed very dangerously; he advised that the duchess should be told.

So she was told, and came across the great house looking like a Burne-Jones in her long black robes, with the fairness of her skin and hair dazzling in their contrast to her garb of woe.

"Is it anything serious?" she said, in an awed voice, for she was really shocked by his appearance, and did not want him to die at this moment of his succession.

"It's skull and cross-bones business; that's what it is," said her husband with a groan. "Rascally east wind did it. Don't come here; you can't do me any good."

A famous London physician, who had probably killed more people than any other doctor living, and was esteemed proportionately, was summoned by telegraph; and by the sick man's own desire the chief solicitor of the county town, who had been legal adviser and agent to the late duke, was sent for, to return in all haste to Staghurst and take down his instructions. Left alone with this person on his arrival, by his own express desire, Cocky, who had scarcely any voice left, whispered to him:

"Would it keep 'em out of the succession if I declare they aren't my children?"

The solicitor hesitated; he felt his own position a most delicate and embarrassing one.

"Your Grace must not entertain such suspicions," he said, with some confusion. "The duchess enjoys the esteem and respect of every——"

"Stow your gab!" hissed Cocky. "All I want to know is—if I made a formal declaration, would it stand?"

"No, sir—it would not."

The lawyer thought the dying man's mind wandered, being himself a country person to whose ears the gossip of smart society did not come. "Oh, your Grace, you

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must not think of such a thing," he added, greatly embarrassed. "Dear me, dear me, I do not know what to say, sir."

"Would it keep her brats out?" said Cocky, as savagely as his failing breath allowed.

The lawyer shook his head. "No, your Grace—it would not. Whatever may have happened, sir, you have condoned, you see. Of course, I am not for a moment supposing that there are any grounds——"

"Stow that bosh!" said his client, as savagely as his weakness allowed. "If I could have divorced her all these years, and didn't? If I said so now?"

The lawyer shook his head again. "It would not stand, sir."

"Why not?" asked Cocky.

"Children born in wedlock must be legitimate heirs, your Grace," the lawyer said, very decidedly, to pierce through the muddled senses of the dying client.

"Wedlock, eh?—wedlock?" repeated Cocky with a chuckle which ended in a convulsive cough. The word tickled his fancy mightily, though Mr. Curton could not imagine what he had said which was ludicrous. "Wedlock!" echoed Cocky; "you won't beat that, Curton, in a brace of years!"

"The word is good law and good English, sir," said the solicitor, a little offended. "I repeat, after so many years of wedlock you could not leave a posthumous charge of the kind behind you. It might be mere pique and malice on your part. No Court would ratify it. It would only make a dreadful scandal, sir, because, I presume, Lord Alberic would endeavor to uphold your declaration, since he is next in succession after your Grace's sons."

An angry flash came into Cocky's sunken colorless eyes.

"Beric? Gad! I'd forgot that. So he would. I'd rather little Jack came after me. He's a good plucked one; bit his lips not to squeal when I pinched him. And I don't dislike poor Harry. He's a good fellow, and she got over him."

A fit of coughing stopped his revelations, to which the

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discreet lawyer turned a deaf ear. He was an excellent person who lived in a large, square, white house, with shrubberies, and a carriage-drive, and a page in buttons; to him marriage was marriage, and a duke and duchess were one and indivisible; when such people got into law courts he was sincerely sorry that they did not respect themselves as greatly as he respected them; he knew that the gentleman, too, who now lay dying had been in many discreditable straits, for he had himself been frequently called in to assist in getting the delinquent out of them; but a duke was a duke, Otterbourne was Otterbourne, in the eyes of the good and conservative attorney, and he had a deaf ear which he could turn very usefully when needed.

To assist in making such a terrible hotch-potch of scandal, as would be made by any posthumous repudiation, might have tempted a London Old Bailey practitioner, but it did not tempt for an instant this respectable rural devotee of Themis.

Cocky was silent for some time, breathing hard and deliberating what he would do. Almost more than his wife he hated his brother Alberic, who had always been the beloved of his father.

He raised himself, at last, feebly on his pillows. "Look here, Curton," he said, with gasping effort, "you make my will, and be quick about it, for I'm dead beat. I can't touch much, I know, but where I can do anything, make it as deuced unpleasant for her as you can; and renew the —the—what d'ye call it—settlement for the jewels, so that she'll have to give 'em up; renew it just as it stood in my father's and grandfather's wills, will you? And look here, Curton: I appoint as guardians my brother-in-law and my uncle Augustus."

Mr. Curton inclined his head in approval.

"Lord Hurstmanceaux and the Bishop of Dunwich? Your Grace could not make a more admirable selection. The highest principle——"

Cocky chuckled with a sound very like the death-rattle. "I choose Ronnie 'cause he's so damned conscientious, he can't refuse, and he'll hate it so; and I choose old Augustus 'cause he came down once when I was a shaver

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at Eton and never tipped me, and gave me a beastly book called 'The Christian Year.' Make it all as deuced annoyin' to both of 'em as you can. Lord, what a pother they'll find all my affairs in—that's a comfort."

And it was a genuine tonic and cordial to him to think how, after his decease, all his sins and embarrassments would continue to circle like mosquitos around the heads of his trustees and executors.

"Beric will hate being left out," he murmured; on the whole he was getting considerable fun out of this ante-mortem duty. But it was a bore to die, an awful bore, just when he had come into things and could do what he liked; he moved restlessly and uneasily on his bed while the lawyer wrote out the clauses of the testament, hastening as much as he could, for he saw that every breath might be his client's last. When the witnesses were called in, oxygen was given to the dying man, and he rallied enough to sit up in his servant's arms and sign "Otterbourne" legibly, in that clear handwriting which he had learned at Eton, and which had signed so much "bad paper."

"I couldn't do much, but I've done what I could," he said feebly, as the pen fell from his fingers. "To be damned disagreeable to 'em all round," he concluded, as his cough permitted him to complete the phrase.

"What a Christian spirit!" murmured the vicar of the village, who was present to witness the will, and had not heard the concluding sentence.

"Shut up!" said Cocky feebly but viciously. "You parsons are just like ravens, always comin' and cawin' where anybody's bein' snuffed out; birds of ill-omen, you are—marryin' and buryin'—he, he!"

The scared vicar looked aghast at the polished London physician. "The mind wanders: the end is near," murmured that bland person, with a professional sigh.

Mr. Curton shook his head as he folded up the document. It was all very painful to the excellent lawyer; it destroyed all his theories of the nobility; and to make a ducal will in a hurry seemed to him almost like *lese-majesty*.

"Oh, my dear sir," he murmured, in sad and useless re-

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gret, "why, oh, why leave such a document as this to such a moment?"

"Always thought the pater'd outlive me," murmured Cocky; "so he would—twenty years—if that byke hadn't upset him."

Mouse, sweet, resigned, composed, regretful, came noiselessly into the chamber of death, leading Jack by the hand, very sober and a little frightened, with his beautiful black eyes wide open and fixed in a vague terror on the bed.

"Dear little angel!" murmured the vicar, at whom Jack was wont to aim paper pellets in church.

Mouse approached the bedside. "Beric is here, dear," she said gently. "He begs to see you. May he come in? Ronald is here, too."

"Goody-goody and the Miser?" said her husband, in a muffled faint voice. "No; tell 'em both to go to the devil."

Cocky closed his eyes, and lay to all outward semblance unconscious and indifferent to worldly things; the worn-out lungs drawing in desperately a few last breaths of air. Who shall say what vain regrets for lost opportunities, for wasted talents, for foolish and fruitless hours, were in his thoughts? He looked already dead, save for the slight labored heaving of his chest beneath the bedclothes.

And there had been a time when in that very house he had been a pretty, innocent, beloved child; when he had been clasped in a mother's arms, her idol and her hope; when he had run across those lawns without with fleet feet and flying hair; when old servants had watched his every step, repeated his every word, and a proud race had seen in him the security for its future continuance and honor!

The vicar by sheer force of habit folded his hands, composed a pious face, and began a prayer.

"O Lord our God, let this Thy good and faithful servant——"

"Stop that," said Cocky, opening his eyes. "I won't bluff the Almighty just at the last out of funk."

It was one feeble flicker of the honor of his race, which he had outraged and derided all the forty years of his life,

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but which in the moment of death came to him for one second. The words shocked his hearers as a blasphemy, but in truth they expressed the only honorable scruple of a dishonorable life. He would not "bluff the Almighty"; he would not at the end of all, and in the face of death, turn, out of fear, to what he had mocked and ridiculed through all his years of life.

"Get on the bed and kiss your poor dear papa, my lord," whispered the nurse, who had followed Jack into the room lest he should worry her lady.

Jack hung back, reluctant, but the slender white hands of his mother, which could hold so tightly, gripped him round the waist and lifted him on to the bed. He burst out crying from fright and a vague pity which stirred in his childish bosom. Then his compassion made him conquer his fears. He put his fresh rosy mouth shrinkingly to the waxen sunken cheek of the dying man. But Cocky by a supreme effort turned his head away with a glare of anger in his eyes, and the child's warm lips kissed the pillow.

"Damn you and your brats!" he said, with enfeebled voice but intensified venom, and his gaze, full of meaning, met hers, and said all which he had never spoken through all the years in which she had borne his name.

"It is so sad how often the dying take a hatred to what they love best in life," she murmured to the London physician, a bland bald person who had buried patients in Westminister Abbey, and that second best Valhalla, St. Paul's.

"Damn you and all your brats!" Cocky muttered feebly again as his gaze sought and found his wife's face through the mist of unreality which was fast hiding all the facts and figures of existence from him for evermore.

"Let us pray," said the vicar in a hushed and awed voice, for he was indeed unspeakably shocked. She dropped on her knees and everyone else knelt also.

Then the shrill short labored breathing ceased to whistle feebly through the silence: the bed-covering heaved no more.

Cocky was dead.

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The child slipped down on to the floor. Alberic Orme and Hurstmanceaux stood hesitating on the threshold of the chamber.

"Oh, dear Duchess!" sighed the fashionable Esculapius, who was eminently pious. "These are the trials which are sent to us to detach us from earthly affections! The ways of God are inscrutable, but we must not question their merciful purpose."

Cocky lay on the bed between them, very straight, very waxen, very like an effigy in yellow stone; but looking down on him his wife shuddered, for it seemed to her that his left eye opened and winked and that his rigid jaw grinned. She had an uncomfortable feeling that, though she would soon comfortably forget all the rest of him, Cocky's grin and Cocky's wink would long rise up in her memory.

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CHAPTER XX.

In another week he also was carried out under the big yews and the Chantrey and Roubiliac statues, and laid beside the remains of his father and forefathers in a black-velvet covered coffin with silver handles and his ducal coronet upon it. But he had no sincere mourners, not one, although in the usual sickly tawdry habit of the time heaps of wreaths and garlands were piled up to his detested memory. His wife was again present, enveloped in the long crape veil of usage, with her two little sons beside her—a most touching and lovely figure. During the ceremony it would have been impossible for any observer to say whether she were profoundly touched or merely apathetic; but at one point in the service, when the village choir were singing a Mendelssohn hymn, her head drooped lower and lower, and her veiled figure moved with what resembled a convulsive sob: a correspondent of a daily paper, indeed, scribbled in shorthand that only for one instant did her admirable fortitude give way to an irrepressible burst of natural anguish. Jack knew better: he nudged Gerry and whispered very low: "Mammy's laughin'. We mustn't."

Amongst the floral decorations there, heaped on and about the coffin, there was a harp made of lilies with silver strings and one string broken. As an emblem of Cocky's life it was really too deliciously funny. It got the better of her nerves and she was forced to bury her face in her handkerchief.

For on the harp was a card, and on the card was written in a big sprawling handwriting, "From Lily."

Lily Larking, of the Salamander Music Hall, of course!

It was too irresistibly droll. She laughed till she really cried.

Happily all human emotions are so closely related that irrepressible laughter resembles irrepressible tears enough

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to deceive a newspaper correspondent and a sympathetic crowd.

"Isn't it too comical?" she said to her sister Carrie.

"Very droll, yes," said Lady Wisbeach. "Awfully cheeky in the woman sending a wreath here."

"How Cocky would laugh if he knew," said his widow: she could not divest herself of the feeling that Cocky did know, and did enjoy, the farce of his own burial.

Poor Cocky! Well, he was buried for good and all, with his crowns and crosses and harps and garlands all left to wither and rot above him, and he would never bore her and worry her and annoy her any more. She felt almost charitably toward him; he might have been worse, he might have been interfering and difficult and quarrelsome, and might have noticed, as his father had done, that the pretty children in his nursery had little resemblance to his family portraits. All was quite safe now, and he was silent for ever under his mass of decaying flowers.

She passed to her carriage on her brother's arm, amidst a respectful murmur of deep admiration and of that genuine good feeling which is so often awakened in crowds, they know not why and hardly know for whom.

"Poor dear pretty crittur, widdered in all her bloom!" said a good village dame to her husband, the water in her honest eyes as they followed the two little fair heads of the orphaned boys.

Then they all returned to the castle, and the will was read, and the thing was over, and she ate a luncheon in her own rooms with a good appetite.

She was relieved that her sisters-in-law had taken their departure without going into, or making any remark about, their late mother's morning-room. The fact was, that these ladies disliked her so extremely that they had hurried away after each funeral as quickly as they could, compatible with usage and decency.

Her portrait by Henner was one of the most beautiful pictures in the galleries of Staghurst; but the old duke's daughters would have preferred less loveliness and more scruples in the mother of the littel boy with the soft black eyes, who was now the lawful head of their family.

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Jack, meanwhile, was full of his own new position, which his mind only dimly grasped; and the whole thing puzzled him greatly. Fifteen days before they had put his grandfather in a box, and shut down the slab of stone on him, and now they were doing the same with poor pappy, who would never any more come behind him on the staircases and painfully pinch his legs, or tap a hot cigarette unexpectedly against his cheek. Why was not Harry here to make it all clear to him? He did not know that Harry, who really and profoundly mourned the dead man, had desired to come to the funeral, had entreated to be allowed to come, but had been peremptorily forbidden.

He noticed that all the people about Staghurst regarded him with awe, and the women bobbed very low in the country lanes; and the young footman who waited on him at table was very solicitous to press on him jams and candied fruits. It was the first time in his life that he had ever had as much jam as he wished for; rank has its privileges still, despite the Labor Party.

"That's the little duke, bless his pretty face!" he had heard the women say who were respectfully gathered about the churchyard entrance to see the great people come out from the gate. And very pretty Jack did look, with his bright hair shining like new gold against his sable garments, and a look of pity and wistfulness and solemnity on his face which was touching.

"Am I really duke and all that?" he asked later of the nurse who had accompanied them to Staghurst.

She replied: "You really are, sir, yes."

"Am I what gran'pa' was?"

"Yes, your Grace, yes."

He pondered deeply on the fact, standing with his legs very wide apart and his brows knitted.

"Then I'll live with Harry."

The nurse, who was discretion itself, answered, "Your Grace will do just what ever your Grace wishes."

"That'll be jolly," said the new duke; and he stood on his golden head.

"But I suppose I shall always have to behave very well," he thought, in a soberer moment. The obligation

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was painful; Jack's natural man was naughty; not as naughty as Boo wished him to be, but still naughty, naughty in a frank sportive merry way, as colts are skittish and pups destructive.

His mother enjoyed her luncheon, because that long Service had given her renewed appetite, and she was infinitely diverted by Lily Larking's wreath; but, all the same, she felt as she had never felt in her life, lonely, insecure, anxious, apprehensive. Cocky had been more support to her than she had realized before his death; his connivance, his condonation, his ready resources in difficulty, his unlimited unscrupulousness, had all been more useful and more valuable than she had ever realized until they were all lost to her for ever. Their association had not been much more creditable than that of two thieves or marauders, but mutual interest had bound them together as it binds those, and the link, when broken, left a blank.

Moreover, had she not married him to be Duchess of Otterbourne? She was Duchess of Otterbourne now, but shorn of all the advantages appertaining to the title except the mere barren rank. Anything more odious than the position of a widow living on her jointure and bullied by trustees, could not, she thought, be conceived. She had not been able to grasp the sense of Cocky's will as it had been read aloud in its barbarous legal jargon and bastard Latin, but she had understood that it was "nasty," very nasty in its provisions; and that as guardians of the children, there were appointed her brother and Augustus Orme, the churchman. She seemed, herself, to come in nowhere, and to have no power or privileges of any sort, and to be cut down as utterly in every way as the provisions of her marriage settlements allowed.

There had been so much solidarity between Cocky and herself in their way of looking at life, in their enjoyment of ruse and expedient, in their mutual sense of the injustice and the nuisance of things, that this sympathy between them had prevented her from perceiving that the man she had married hated her very bitterly for having married him. She was not in the least prepared for the many forms of vengeance which were gathered together in that

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neat and formal document which was the last will and testament of the companion of her life.

Cocky had never expected to outlive his father; but he had always said to himself: "By God, if I *do*——!"

The law—that stiff, starched, unbending, and unpleasant thing which comes so often between us and our desires—had denied him the pleasure of doing much that he had wished to do, but all that it had let him do he had done to punish and torment the lady who had wedded him "with a card up her sleeve."

When Hurstmanceaux and Alberic Orme came to visit her, after the lawyers and the other members of the family had left the castle, they were both surprised to see how seriously depressed and how much worn she looked.

"Did you see Lily Larking's wreath? It was too droll," were her first words.

Lord Alberic briefly replied that he had not.

"It was scandalous that it was allowed to pass the church doors," said Hurstmanceaux. "I suppose they did not know."

"Of course they did not know; who should have heard of Lily Larking in Somersetshire? We can go up to town to-night, can't we, Ronnie?"

"Do you wish it? There is a ten o'clock train. The children would be better in bed."

"That does not matter. I want to be in town."

She was anxious to get away from Staghurst, which had grown hateful to her, and was very desirious to learn something which she could only learn in London, *viva voce*, from her own lawyer, Mr. Gregge, a gentleman who had not been invited to either of the funerals, though his existence, as her confidential adviser, had been known to both the families.

She and her brother and brother-in-law dined together at eight o'clock. She was silent and pre-occupied.

"Who would ever have imagined that any woman would lament Cocky's loss?" thought Alberic Orme; and Hurstmanceaux thought, "*Souvent femme varie, bien fol qui s'y fie.* The idea of her mourning for Cocky!" They could not see into her mind, which was gloomy and

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troubled, like the dark old ponds which were lying black under a fitful moonlight in the melancholy park without.

Both the men who accompanied her up to town were perplexed. The tears which rose to her eyes, the unmistakable trouble in her expression, the look of anxiety and sorrow were genuine; there was no doubt about it. Lord Alberic, who had always been very cold to her, wondered if he had done her injustice all these years, and Hurstmanceaux, who knew her better, thought: "She counted on having a rattling good time on the succession, and she's really sorry that little blackguard is dead."

But it was a matter concealed from almost everyone, and of which neither family dreamed, which was racking her nerves like neuralgia. It was the destination of the big diamond, the roc's egg, which had been her ostensible object in marrying Cocky.

When she thought of that jewel, high-couraged and mettlesome and thoroughbred though she was, a sickly chill passed over her, and she shuddered, as she looked at her brother's profile in the faint light of the railway-lamp, as the train sped through the night. For she had, in vulgar parlance, pawned the famous jewel.

That is to say, that being in great want of money, of a sum so large that no one she could appeal to would be likely or even able to give it to her, she had borrowed that sum, four years previously, on the roc's egg, of a great jeweler, who had caused to be made for her such a precise counterfeit in paste that no detection was possible by the naked eye.

The famous jeweler was a Pole by birth, a Parisian by long residence and habit; he had dropped his own name, which had been politically compromised in his earliest manhood and for forty years had traded in the city of his adoption as a naturalized Frenchman, known as M. Boris Beaumont. His riches were now great; his taste in and knowledge of gems were unerring; and he had that note of fashion without which a great tradesman in Paris is an Apollo without a bow or a lute. All the great ladies were his clients; without something of Beaumont's no bridal *corbeille* was well furnished; his exquisite trifles were the most distinguished of New Year's gifts. He was

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deferential, good-natured, adroit; in his trade he was absolutely to be depended on; if Beaumont told you a stone was good, you might buy it without further warranty, and you would never repent; the price of it was high, even very high; but if you made that objection he would say briefly with a little shrug: "*Que voulez-vous? Ça vient de moi!*"

Behind his very elegant shop was a conservatory, behind the conservatory was a little salon where his patronesses could have ices or tea according to the season, and read Gyp's last delightful persiflage. In that little salon many a secret has been confided to Beaumont; many a dilemma been exposed to him.

"*Les honnêtes femmes! Les honnêtes femmes!*" he said once to a friend. "*Ah mon cher, il n'y qu'elles pour canaille!*" But it was rarely he was so indiscreet as this, though he knew so many of the passions and pains which throbbed under the diamond tiaras and the sapphire *rivières* in the brains and in the breasts of his fair clients.

Now and then Beaumont went to the opera, or to the Français on a Tuesday, and from his modest stall looked up at his patrician patronesses in all the beauty of their semi-nudity, their admirable *maquillage*, their wondrous toilettes, and then he smiled as he lowered his glasses with a little malice but more indulgence.

To Mouse, of course, Beaumont was well known: when she had wanted this large sum he had taken it from his capital for her, but as security he would accept in return nothing less than the famous Otterbourne jewel.

"You have it. Bring it me," he said as simply as if he had been speaking of a bit of cornelian or agate.

In vain she implored, protested, entreated, wept, tried all the armory of persuasion, represented that he was tempting her to a crime, actually to a crime!

"Ah, no, madame," said Beaumont very gently, "I tempt you to nothing. I would rather keep my three hundred thousand francs in the Bank of France. I do not wish for your diamond at all. Only if there be any question of this loan, that is the only security I can take for it. Whether you like these terms or not is nothing to

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me; they are mine, and I cannot change them. The affair will oblige you, madame, not me."

Beaumont was not an unkind man; more than one young actress had owed her prosperity to him, more than one honorable family had been saved from ruin by his assistance; but to women like Mouse he was inflexible, he had not a shred of compassion for their troubles, and never believed a word they spoke; he dealt with them harshly and obstinately; he despised them from the depths of his soul, the pretty creatures, who sipped his iced mocha, and broke off the buds of his Malmaison roses.

The roc's egg was brought to him one heavily raining day by a lady in a cab in whom he, well used though he was to such secret visits, had difficulty in recognizing the blonde English beauty. It had been now in his possession for four years, and though it was a magnificent object such as could be fully appreciated only by trained eyes like his own, he began to get tired of keeping it locked up, and unseen by any eyes save his own. He would not have felt tired if she had paid him any interest on his loan; but she had never paid him a centième. She had not even paid anything for the imitation diamond which had cost him a good deal, for it was admirably and exquisitely made; it had been worn many times at Courts at home and abroad, and she had nearly laughed outright more than once at the precautions with which it was surrounded when it was not worn, and the fire-proof iron safe screwed down to the floor in which it dwelt when it was not the envied occupant of her own white breast; not even the sharp suspicious eyes of Cocky had ever discerned any difference in it from that of the great gem which it represented.

"*C'est une ingrâte*," said Beaumont to himself when he saw a person for whom he had done so much flash past him on the boulevards as she drove to Chantilly or La Marche; and he hated ingratitude.

For her own part, having given him the great jewel and worn the substitute successfully, she had of late dismissed the subject from her mind with her usual happy *insouciance*. But now, clauses in her husband's will and in that of his father's, had recalled it to her harshly, and

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with insistence. She knew that the jewels, like most other things, were held in trust for the little rosy-cheeked man in the further corner of the carriage; and that sooner or later they would be subjected to examination, and in all probability taken out of her custody. She had no longer even the rights in them which are called rights of user. So much she had gathered as she had listened to the reading of the will; she was not sure, but she was afraid, and this glacial fear gripped her light and courageous heart, and almost made its pulses stand still.

She felt almost to hate the unconscious little duke, tucked up in a bear-skin with his legs crossed under him in a corner of the railway carriage.

Jack could not get out of his mind the idea of poor Pappy being left all alone in that dark stone place underground; "and he can't even smoke," he thought, with a tender pity in his little heart for the man who had so often pinched his legs and tugged at his hair. His mother reclined in her compartment looking very white, grave, and angry, in her sombre clothes, and in her unwonted taciturnity; his uncles talked to each other of things that he could not understand. Gerry was sound asleep; Jack watched the steam fly past the window-pane.

"It's a horrid thing to be deaded," he thought. "Oh, I hope,—I hope,—I *do* hope,—Harry won't ever be deaded."

In his fervor he said the words unconsciously aloud.

"What nonsense are you talking to yourself?" said his mother angrily. "And people say dead—not deaded."

Jack shrank into his corner and watched the wreaths of steam fly on against the dark.

"What's the use of being all grandpa' was?" he thought. "Mammy 'll always be bullying."

Jack had seen his grandfather omnipotent, deferred to by everybody, and independent in all actions; why did not these privileges descend with the dukedom to himself?

"You're a minor, Jack," one of his aunts had said to him, but the word had only confused him. He thought it meant a man who worked underground with a pickaxe and a safety-lamp as he had seen them drawn in instructive books.

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"Harry'll tell me all I can do," he thought; and comforted by that thought he fell asleep like his brother.

"I can see no one," she said to her groom of the chambers the next morning in Stanhope Street.

"No exceptions, your Grace?" asked that functionary, his mind reverting to Brancepeth.

"None," she answered curtly—"at least only Gregge."

This gentleman waited on her and bore himself with a manner that expressed his wounded feelings at not having been sent for into the country.

"Never mind that," she said impatiently. "They don't like you, you know, because you give me good advice, and they think it bad; I want you to tell me what rights I have."

"I was not at the reading of the will, your Grace," replied Mr. Gregge, still full of his own wrongs.

"But I am sure you know all about it."

"I have heard something from Messrs. Wilton and Somers," he answered cautiously, naming the London solicitors of the late dukes.

"Well, what rights have I?"

"Your rights are limited, madam; exceedingly limited. At least I believe so. I have no positive information."

Her pretty teeth shut tightly together. He seemed to her less polite and deferential than usual.

"I do as I like with the children, don't I?" she asked angrily.

"Subject to their guardians' approval."

"That is to say, I don't?"

He was silent.

She beat the carpet very feverishly with her foot.

"I keep the jewels, of course?"

"Your own, madam, of course."

"I mean the Otterbourne jewels; the great Indian diamond?"

"No, madam. I fear they will be removed from your keeping. You have no right of user over them."

Her eyes dilated with a strange expression.

"They are not mine? For my lifetime?"

Then, alarmed at the terror and fury he read in her countenance, he hastened to add:

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"I speak as *amicus curiæ;* I have not read the will; if you wish me to confer with the late duke's legal advisers I will do so, and inform you more exactly of your position."

She assented and dismissed him with scant courtesy, being a prey to extreme anxiety. She had never entertained any doubt as to her jurisdiction over the children and the jewels, and she had never correctly comprehended the changed position in which the death of her husband places a woman of rank. She wrote to Beaumont a harsh and imperious letter in the third person, ordering him to come to her at once and bring her property with him. In her eyes, whatever he might be in his own, he was only a tradesman.

Beaumont knew very well that he had done an invalid thing, and that the signature of the lady locked up in his safe was in law worth nothing. But he was used to doing illegal things, he always found they answered best. The transaction was *bonâ fide* on his part, and the jewel was in his hands.

Before the Duke of Otterbourne would lose it, and let the matter be brought before a tribunal, Beaumont knew very well that he himself should be repaid. She could not repay him, her husband could not, but the family, the head of the family, would. So he had always reasoned. "*La famille! C'est le magot de ces gens là,*" he said to himself.

The death of the Duke of Otterbourne had disgreeably surprised him, and made him take a trip across the Channel, a fidgety, worrying little journey which he at all times disliked, for he was never comfortable out of the Rue de la Paix. He had scarcely reached London when the newspapers informed him of the illness, and in a few days of the demise, of the late duke's successor. He was much too well-bred to intrude on the retreat of the widowed duchess. He knew that the retreat would not last very long. He amused himself by going to see the imitation jewelery of Birmingham, and was lost in wonder that a nation which has the art of India under its eyes can outrage heaven and earth by gewgaws meet for savages. Then, having taken precautions so as to be informed of

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all which might be done with the Otterbourne heirlooms, he returned to the home of his heart and awaited events. When some few days later he received her curt summons he was extremely astonished, but agreeably so; he concluded he was about to receive his money. No one, he thought, would write in that imperious tone who was not prepared to pay to the uttermost farthing. So he reluctantly again undertook that fidgeting little journey of Calais-Douvres which the wit and wisdom of two nations are content to leave in chaos whilst they ridicule the Chinese for not making good roads.

He read her letter again on the steamer; it was so very uncivil that it could only mean payment, immediate and complete. Why not? The Otterbourne family was after all a very illustrious one.

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CHAPTER XXI.

"Poor papa is deaded," said Jack to Boo on his return to town; in the tenderness of his heart he was beginning to forget the dead man's pinches and to pity his retirement from the world.

"I know; and I do hate black so," said Boo twitching wrathfully at her frock.

"I'm 'fraid he must be so dull in heaven," said Jack seriously. "I don't think they let them race, or bet, or do anything amusin' there."

He wasn't sure, but he thought he had heard so.

"I ought to have gone down as well as you, instead of Gerry," said Boo, who had been exceedingly aggrieved at being left in town like Baby.

"Oh, no," said Jack with much dignity, "you're not in the succession; you're a female."

"A female? Me? How dare you?" cried Boo in a red fury of wrath, and gave him a resounding box on the ear. The head of her House perceived that he was not a hero to his relatives, and, ignorant of the French proverb, turned to the servants.

"I'm Duke, James," he said to his friend the hall-boy.

"So I've heard, your Grace."

"We'll play marbles all day long, James."

"All right, sir."

"Why aren't you a duke, James?"

The hall-boy grinned.

"*M. le Duc ne doit pas causer avec les domestiques*," said the French governess, and took hold of him by his right ear and propelled him upstairs.

"*Pourquoi nong pas?*" asked Jack.

"*Parcequ'ils sont vos inférieurs*," replied the French lady.

Jack did like the reply, it sounded harsh, he did not believe it was true; James beat him at marbles, and could

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make popguns and cut out boats, and had talents and virtues innumerable.

Jack loved the hall-boy, and had once got into dreadful disgrace by taking his place and answering the door, to let his friend go round the corner.

As he was being driven upstairs by the governess he heard the voice of Brancepeth arguing with a footman; the young man was insisting that they should let him in, and the servants were apologizing, her Grace's orders had been positive. Jack, with a leap like a chamois's, rushed downstairs and leaped into his friend's arms.

"Well, your Grace," said Brancepeth, as he kissed the child, "how is my lord duke, eh?"

Brancepeth had not been allowed to go down to Staghurst, even for the funeral; he had been desired to allege military duties as an obstacle, and had done so, though he thought it brutally uncivil to poor Cocky.

Jack laughed; his rosy face was bright above his black jersey; but he tried to look serious, as he had been told that he ought to do.

"Mammy says we must not laugh," he said sorrowfully. "Come in here."

He pulled his favorite by the hand into the library.

"He's deaded you know," he whispered solemnly.

Brancepeth nodded; he sat down on a low chair, took Jack on his knee and kissed him.

"He won't pinch my calves any more," said Jack with a sense of relief.

"He won't do anything any more, poor devil," said his friend, who sincerely mourned him.

Jack was silent, trying to realize the position and failing. "Cuckoopint's mine now, ain't he?" he said suddenly.

Cuckoopint was Cocky's cob.

"Everything's yours, you lucky little beggar," said Brancepeth. "But don't flatter yourself they'll let you do as you like. Ronnie and the bishop between 'em will keep you uncommon tight."

Jack did not attend to this foreboding: his mind was full of Cuckoopint.

"Were you with him when he died, Jack?" asked

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Brancepeth, who felt a morbid interest in Cockey's end. Jack nodded.

"Yes; he said 'damn'; they told me to go on the bed and kiss him, but he wouldn't; he said 'damn.'"

"Poor devil!" sighed Brancepeth with a twinge in his conscience like neuralgia.

"Well, you've a long minority," he added as he kissed the child again. "Things'll pull round and get straight in all these years, but I'm afraid you'll run amuck when you're your own master, you naughty little beggar. I don't know though, I think you've got grit in you."

Jack meditated profoundly. Then he whispered in his elder's ears, "If I'm all that grandpa' was mayn't I live without mammy somewhere? Take Cuckoopint and Boo and live with 'oo?"

Brancepeth shook his head with a sigh. "No, Jack, you'll never live with me. At least——" he paused as a certain possibility crossed his mind. "As for your mother," he added, "well, you'll see as much of her as *she* wishes, wherever you live. You won't see more."

Jack's face puckered up ready for a good cry; his position did not seem to him changed in any of its essentials.

"And Cuckoopint?" he said piteously.

"They'll sell Cuckoopint probably," said Brancepeth. "But I'll try and buy him and keep for you; you're not big enough to ride him yet."

Jack threw his arms about his friend's throat.

"I do love 'oo, Harry. Oh, I *do* love 'oo!"

Brancepeth pressed the boy to him fondly; he knew the caress was chiefly for the sake of Cuckoopint. Still it was sweet to him.

"And that poor devil died with a bad word in his mouth," he thought; and something as like remorse as any modern person can feel stirred in him.

The widowed duchess could not see her Parisian creditor at her own house. It would be known that he came there, and would look very odd at such a time, and might awaken her brother's suspicions. She ordered him to meet her at the house of a famous Court dressmaker, a woman who had been often useful to her in more agree-

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able appointments and more interesting embarrassments. She went out alone on foot, ostensibly to church, deeply veiled of course, at ten o'clock on the Sunday morning which followed her husband's funeral. The Court dressmaker lived in a private house in Green Street, and she had not far to go. There, in a perfectly safe seclusion, she awaited the arrival of her creditor.

She was in a pretty room on the first floor. It had rose blinds and heavy curtains, and had been furnished in subdued and artistic style by a famous firm of decorators; she knew the room well, and it had always been at her disposition. Her heart had throbbed more agreeably, but never so nervously, there, as it did this Sunday morning whilst the church bells jangled and boomed in her ears, and the warm steam of a *calorifère* heating a foggy atmosphere, made her feel sick and faint. In a few moments the jeweler was announced—a slender, frail, fair man of some sixty-five years old, who saluted her gracefully, and in return had a haughty stare which revealed to him forcibly that he was a tradesman and she was a gentlewoman. Beaumont, who was accustomed to different treatment, said to himself that she wanted a lesson. Nothing costs us so dear in this world as our pride, and if we cannot afford to purchase the privilege of its indulgence the world will make us smart for claiming so great a luxury.

The deep black of her attire, so trying to most of her sex, only made fairer her skin, made brighter her hair and her eyes, and lent a richer rose to her lips; she looked extremely well, though she looked cross and anxious as she saw the jeweler enter.

"Good morning, Beaumont!" she said sharply. "Have you brought the jewels?"

He smiled: the question seemed to him of an extraordinary *naïveté* for a lady who knew the world so well.

"I do not carry jewels in my pocket, madame," he replied. "I am here to speak of yours."

"Didn't you get my letter?"

"Yes, madame; am I not here by your appointment?"

"But I ordered you to bring the diamonds?" she asked with that brusque authority which was part of her being.

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"I came to speak of the transaction, madame," he repeated and smiled.

The cool audacity of her manner and commands diverted him. He perceived that she had no intention of paying him. "The cocotte has never been born," he thought, "who could hold a candle to a great lady for impudence."

If she had asked him to sit down he still would have refrained from troubling her; but she said no syllable that was civil; she continued to look at her creditor with haughty impatience.

"Be quick about what you have to say then," she remarked; "I can only stay a few moments here; I am going to church."

A creditor, if deftly treated as a Buddha of power and sanctity, may be disarmed, for, although a creditor, he is human. But if he be "cheeked" and treated as of no importance he is naturally moved to use his thunderbolt and assert his godhead. Beaumont sat down without invitation or permission, and she, to show her disgust at such familiarity, rose and remained standing.

"Madame," he said very politely, "have you forgotten the paper which you signed?"

She was silent, darting azure lightning on him from her eyes. She did not distinctly remember what she had signed. She had not very clearly understood it at the time of signing; it had been all done in such a hurry, and the cab had been waiting for her in the rain, and she had wanted to get back to the Bristol unseen and dress for a dinner at the English Embassy, and the time to do so had been very short. Certainly she remembered writing her name; but the words above her name she did not recall; it was more than four years ago.

Beaumont saw that she had forgotten.

"I warned you of the importance of what you signed," he said politely. "If you desire now to read it over——"

"Is that what I signed?" she said eagerly; she thought it would not be difficult to get it away from him; he looked very weak and small, and must, she thought, be seventy if he were a day.

Beaumont smiled.

"It is a copy."

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Her face clouded; she took it with an impatient gesture and read its clauses. The lines were few, but they clearly stated that she was the sole and lawful owner of the diamond and transferred it to the keeping of the jeweler until such time as he should be repaid in full, capital and interest.

"Well, madame?" said Beaumont, having waited for five long minutes, during which she stood looking out of the window, her foot irritably beating on the carpet.

"What is there to say?" she replied bluntly, her brain was less clear than usual. "I can't pay you, if that's what you want."

Beaumont raised his eyebrows.

"I conclude I have the honor of being your Grace's first creditor, or you would have learned by painful experience that it is not well to be impolite to creditors. The situation is changed since you signed that little memorandum. I was content to wait whilst the good Duke of Otterbourne was living: but he is dead, and I am indisposed to wait, and if you cannot pay me I must see who will."

"You beast!" muttered Mouse between her pearl like teeth.

"I do not think I am a beast," said Beaumont meekly. "At least, not more so than most men. I took you at your word, madame, and it appears that your word was—was not entirely to be depended upon. It appears that the jewel is an heirloom; it goes to your little boy under settlement in trust. So I am informed by those competent to know."

She stood with her profile turned toward him, and continued to look out of the window at the house opposite.

"If it is my son's you can't claim it," she said sullenly. "You knew well enough at the time it wasn't mine. You only pretended to believe that it was. You did an illegal thing when you lent me the money; and you know you can't go into any Court about it. My husband was alive then; my signature was not worth a farthing, you know that!"

Beaumont gazed at her in admiration for her boldness, in compassion for her temerity and want of worldly wisdom.

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"I have done business sometimes, madame, in Paris," he said softly, "with persons of your sex who are not considered, there, pure enough to sit beside you in the tribune at Chantilly, or at the Institute, or at the Chambers. But amongst those *horizontales* I never knew one quite of your force. *Je vous en fais mes compliments.*"

Angry blood flew into the fair cheeks of his debtor; her blue eyes flashed like stormy summer skies; her hand clenched till her rings cut into the skin.

"You dare to insult me because my lord is dead!"

Cocky in memory really appeared to her, at this moment, as a very tower of strength.

Beaumont made a little gesture of smiling protestation.

"Oh, madame, if your lord were living he would not make much difference to me in this matter, or to any action of your creditors. But he would certainly have apprehended the situation more quickly than you do."

"You are an insolent!"

She would have reached to touch the button of the electric bell, but Beaumont interposed.

"Do not make a scandal, duchesse; I shall not, if you do not press me too far. I am not your enemy. I never expose women if I can help it. Nature made them dishonest; jewels and money are to them what cherries and apples are to schoolboys. That is why they are so much better shut up in harems. However, I came for strict business; let us limit ourselves to it. You say I cannot go into a tribunal. You have relied upon that fact. But it is a rotten staff to lean on; it is not a fact. I both can and will go into any number of tribunals about this matter. They may nonsuit me. I may, perhaps, lose both the diamond and the money; but I have plenty of money and no children, and it will amuse me, madame, to see you cross-examined. It will not amuse you."

She stared fixedly at the windows of the opposite house, and observed, as people do observe extraneous matters in moments of horrible agitation, that the lace curtains to them were very soiled. Her heart heaved under the crape *fichû* of her bodice, and he saw that it was only by great effort that she controlled herself from some bodily assault upon him.

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"What a godsend for the illustrated press such a trial would be!" he continued, in quiet, amused tones. "But it would be disagreeable to you, because those papers disfigure so the pretty people whom they pretend to represent."

"You would never dare to go to law!" she interrupted in a hoarse, fierce voice. "You would not dare! You would be punished yourself!"

"I should be punished, possibly, by losing the money. They would nonsuit me, but I think they would make you pay my costs. But as I have said, I do not mind losing the money; I have a good deal and no children, and I am old——"

"Well, then, why make this hideous fuss?"

Beaumont smiled.

"Why not make you, madame, a free gift of the money and the interest? *Allez donc!* You ought to be too proud to dream of taking a present from a tradesman. If I were a young man I might —on conditions—but I am old, and a beautiful woman is not much more to me than an ugly one, alas! Besides, you have been very rude, duchesse. No one should be so rude as that who does not stand on a solid bank balance."

She turned her head over her shoulder and flashed a scathing glance upon him.

"How much longer are you going to prose on in this way? I want to go out."

Beaumont shook his head. "You will not learn wisdom? You are wrong, madame. Twist a tiger's tail, laugh at an anarchist, and put nitro-glycerine in your dressing-bag, but never, ah, never be rude to anyone who has you in his power."

"In your power? I? In yours? You are mad."

"Oh, no; I am entirely sane. Saner than you, madame; for you do not seem to understand that you have done a very ugly thing, a vulgar thing even; what is called in English, I believe, a first-class misdemeanor, for you obtained a very large sum by false representation."

She changed color; she was intelligent and she did see her conduct in the light in which twelve London jurymen would be likely to see it, and also in the shape in which

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the Radical press would be certain to present it to their public.

Beaumont relented a little. A man may be too old to fully appreciate beauty, but he is always kinder to a pretty woman than to a plain one. Moreover he had no real inclination to figure in the law courts himself, though to punish her he was prepared to take her into them.

"Is it possible, madame," he said with hesitation, "that all the great people you belong to cannot arrange this small matter for you without forcing me to go to extremes? The magnificent English aristocracy."

"The magnificent English aristocracy," she repeated with unspeakable scorn, "who are coal-owners, corn-factors, horse-dealers, game-vendors, shop-owners, tradesmen, every man Jack of them, are most of them bankrupt tradesmen, my good Beaumont! They are obliged to ally themselves with tradesmen who aren't bankrupt—like you—to keep their heads above water. The great families with whom I am allied, as you expressed it, couldn't, I believe, amongst them all raise a thousand guineas in solid coin."

"But you came to me for twelve thousand," thought Beaumont; aloud he merely said, "But monsieur your brother? Surely he——"

A shiver ran over her from head to foot. She would rather, she thought, face the Middlesex jury than tell this tale to Ronald.

"My brother has all the copy-book virtues," she answered sharply. "He would sell his shirt to pay you if you told him this story, but if he hasn't got a shirt?"

"You speak figuratively, I presume?"

"Figuratively? I mean what I say. Well, of course he's got shirts to his back; but that is pretty well all he has got. And he is guardian to the boy, to all the children."

"I understand."

He saw in what a position Hurstmanceaux would be placed between his duty to his wards and his sentiment for his sister if the knowledge of what had been done with the roc's egg came before him. "But if he be a poor man it would be no use to worry him," thought Beaumont, who was keenly practical, and who, in this matter, merely

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wanted to get his money back, and to be safely out of what he knew was not a very creditable position for himself, since the family would naturally argue that he should not have taken Lady Kenilworth's unsupported word in a matter of so much importance.

"Every one knows the high character of Lord Hurstmanceaux," he said, to gain time for his own reflections. Mouse repressed a rude exclamation; she was so utterly sick of Ronnie's character. A brother who had known how to do all the things that Cocky had used to do, and would have put her up to doing them, would have been so much more useful at the moment. She felt that she had not drunk at the fountain of knowledge during her husband's lifetime as she ought to have done. For a person who was not hampered by scruples she was most blamably ignorant about the ins and outs and hooks and crooks of left-handed financing.

Beaumont waited in polite silence. He was not a hard or harsh man and he was not insensible to the purity of her profile as she stood sideways against the window; he saw that she was genuinely alarmed and genuinely powerless; the folded crape which went crossways over her bosom heaved with her deep drawn hurried breathing.

"Have you no friend?" he said at last very softly and with a world of meaning in the tone.

She changed countenance; she could not pretend to misunderstand his meaning.

"Friends have more sympathy than relatives," he added in the same meditative manner. "It is true, madame, that your dilemma is not in itself interesting; it resembles too much actions which receive unlovely names when in a lower class than yours, still a beautiful woman can always persuade the weaker sense to be blind to her errors; at least until those errors have been proclaimed in print, so that all who run may read them."

He took a natural and not a very malignant vengeance in his words, but to her he seemed a very Mephistopheles torturing her with every refined devilry.

And she was insulted and she could not resent! She could not ring for her servants and have this man turned into the street.

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The twelve thousand pounds had melted like morning mist. She could scarcely remember what they had gone for; but the bitter insult remained, would remain, she thought, with her for ever.

He rose and stood before her. "Well?" he said gently.

"You have a right to your money, I suppose," she said sullenly between her set teeth. "I have no notion on earth how to get you a farthing, but if you will wait a month and not speak to my brother in the interval, I will —I will see what I can do."

Beaumont bowed.

"I will wait six months and I will speak to no one. But if at the end of six months I do not receive all, I shall speak, with pain, madame, but inevitably not to your brother but to the world."

"I understand," she said haughtily. "You will do your worst. Well, never enter my presence again, that is all; and leave it now this moment."

Beaumont smiled with admiration and regret combined.

"You are very unwise, madame. If you had not been rude to me I would have accorded you a year. *Mais on chasse de race.*"

She knew that it was unwise to be so insolent, but she could not have made herself polite to him to save her life. He punished her for having tricked him and flouted her. He was a very rich man and she had offended him.

She saw her mistake, but she would not have resisted repeating it if he had come back into the room. Women always bring temper into business, and that is why they fail in it so frequently, for those who do not bring temper bring sentiment, and the one is as ruinous as the other.

She had a rapid imagination; she saw before her the crowded court, the witness-box where prevarication was of no use, all her dearest friends with their *lorgnons* lifted, the bench of the scribbling reporters, the correspondents of the illustrated papers making their sketches furtively and staring at her as she had stared at people in *causes célèbres*; she saw it all, even the portraits of herself which would appear in those woodcuts of artistic journals which would make Helen's self hideous and Athene's self grotesque.

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She saw it all—all the huge headings in the posters and papers, all the staring eyes, all the commiserating censure, all the discreet veiled enjoyment of her acquaintances, all the rancid acrid virulence of the rejoicing Radical press.

She imagined that Beaumont would not get his money easily because she knew something about the risks run by those who lend on an imperfect title, as to minors or to women; but she had seen in his regard that he would not mind losing any amount of money if he had his revenge on her in putting her into court.

Actually, Beaumont was by no means a revengeful, nor even a hard man, and a very little diplomacy would have made him favorable to her..

She hated him more intensely than she had ever hated anyone. For in the first place he had done her a favor, and in the second place she had done him a wrong—a mixture which naturally produces the strongest hatred. She knew that, despite his courtesy, she had nothing more to hope from him; that he would have his money back again, or he would make the transaction public.

Public sympathy would be entirely with him against herself. Even that, however, seemed to her less horrible than the fact that Ronald would know what she had done. At the bottom of her heart she was not very brave; she could hector and bully, and command, and she had that share in the physical courage of her race which took her unflinching over a bullfinch in the shires. But she had not the moral courage which would allow that punishment was just and bear it calmly. It was probable that Ronald and her brothers-in-law would never let the matter come to a trial, that they would get the money between them together somehow, though they were all as poor as Job; but to have the matter brought before these prejudiced persons seemed to her worse than the law court itself. Ronald she dreaded, the Ormes she detested, and her sisters' husbands she thought the most odious prigs in the world; to come before a family council of this sort would be more unsupportable than the law court itself, which would at least contain an element of excitement, and in which her personal appearance would be sure to rouse some feeling in her favor. To that personal

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fascination her brother and her brothers-in-law were at all times insensible.

"Some women have men belonging to them who are of some use," she thought bitterly, "but all the men I have anything to do with are paupers and prigs. What is a family made for if it is not to pull one through awkward places, and follow one with a second horse?"

She hated her family fiercely. It seemed to her that it was all their fault that she had been placed in such a dreadful dilemma. If there was one thing more sure than another, she knew that it was the dead certainty that everybody in her world were as poor as rats, unless they were men of business who did not properly belong to that world at all. It was wonderful how soon you come to the end of a man's resources! No one knew that better than herself. As for the bigwigs who look so swell and imposing to the classes which know nothing about them, she was but too well aware of the carking cares, the burdened lands, the desperate devices which sustained their magnificent appearances as the rotten timbers of a doomed ship may support a gilded figure-head.

"By the time Jack's thirty years old the whole rotten thing will be gone like a smashed egg," she thought, with a certain pleasure in reflecting that all the wearisome and impertinent precautions which Jack's guardians took to shelter his interests would be of no avail for him in the long run against the rapidly rising tide of English socialism.

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CHAPTER XXII.

SHE remained in London May and June. Of course it was deadly dull, but people came to dine with her; she could dine with her very intimate friends; and men were in and out all day long from the Commons and the club and the guard-rooms; and she made a lovely picture in her floating crape garments, cut a little low round the throat *en bébé*, to show its white and slender beauty. Everyone felt bound to do their best to console her, and the task was a pleasant one even to her own sex, for her house, in a subdued discreet manner, was always full of agreeable persons, and softly buzzing with the latest news.

When she drove in the park with her whole equipage turned into mourning, she had one or other of her golden-haired children always with her, and the spectacle was one which especially touched the policemen at the crossings, the old apple-women at the corners, the workingmen eating their bread and cheese on the benches, and all that good-natured, credulous, purblind throng which creates popular opinion.

"Our public men don't make up enough," she thought, seeing the effect which she had on the multitude. "Napoleon's white horse and Boulanger's black one did half their business for them. The public should always be governed through its eyes and its appetites; our leaders of it appeal to its mind—a non-existent entity."

Black was very becoming to her. It is the surest of consolations to have a dazzlingly fair skin which crape adorns. Still death in the house is always tiresome; there are so many pleasant things which we cannot do. On the whole she thought it would have been better if Cocky had lived some little time longer.

Cocky's death had happened at an awkward moment. The London season was irrevocably lost to her. All her new gowns must remain shut up in their cases. There was nowhere in the known world (of society) where she

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could by any possibility dance and laugh and flirt and play cards, and go to races, and do theatres, and sup at restaurants, and generally amuse herself for the next six months. She did not care for conventionality, but there are things which no well-bred person can do; observances which the mere usage of the world enforces as it does the wearing of clothes, or of shoes and stockings.

She was wholly unconscious of the benevolent intentions which Cocky had entertained toward her; she had never dreamed that he would think of causing a *cause célèbre* in connection with her.

She wished devoutly that he had lived for a year or two after his succession. The tutelage of Ronald was a prospect which appalled her.

She knew that Ronald, however generous with his own, would be a very dragon in defence of his ward's possessions; and the little duke's minority would be an exceedingly long one. From all power she had herself been carefully and mercilessly excluded by all the provisions alike of her husband and of his father. The terms of the wills had been sufficiently explained to her to leave her no doubt in that respect. Her courage was high and her carelessness was great; but both quailed at the idea of many matters which would inevitably now come under her brother's eyes.

Cocky had been a bore; but you could always shut Cocky's eyes and his mouth too if you had a twenty-pound note to give him; and he was never in the least degree curious whence it came.

Cocky had had many defects, but he had been at times a very convenient person; she had wished him dead very often, but now that he was really dead she was rather sorry. She could not now even take any of that lace away from Staghurst; it would all be locked up again to wait twenty years for Jack's wife.

She was not in the least afraid of doing wrong, but she was keenly afraid of being found out, and especially of being found out by her brother. She knew very well that Ronald's toleration of her and affection for her were entirely based on the fact that she had in a great degree always succeeded in blindfolding him.

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He knew her to be reckless, imprudent, and madly extravagant, but he thought her innocent in other ways, and compromised by her husband.

Oh, the support that Cocky had been! She did feel genuine sorrow for his loss. To lose your scapegoat, your standing apology, your excuse for everything, is worse than to lose your jewel-box, especially when it has only paste copies of your jewels in it. She would really have liked to have had Cocky survive a few years as Duke of Otterbourne. They would not have had much money, but they would have had such quantities of credit that their want of actual money would scarcely have been felt. They would have sold everything which settlement would have allowed them to sell, and very probably found means even to break the entail.

She was wholly unaware that the very first use he would have made of his accession would have been to drag her into the glare of that transpontine melodrama which is played in the Court of Probate and Divorce. In the glare of his dying eyes she had indeed recognized hatred, but she had not known that such hatred would have taken its worst vengeance on her had he lived.

She did not know that fate, often so favorable to her, had never done her so kind a turn as when it had made him catch that cold at his father's grave in the bitter east winds of the March morning. He had been something to complain of, to fret about, to quarrel with; at his door she could lay any responsibility she chose, and he had been often useful in a great strait through the ingenuity and unscrupulousness of his devices. Then she had cordially detested him, and that sentiment alone had something exhilarating about it like a glass of bitters.

And yet again it had been the existence of Cocky which had made Harry interesting. Now that it could become quite proper for her to annex Harry, in the manner dear to Mrs. Grundy, he lost a great deal of his attraction. He fell suddenly in value like a depreciated currency.

After the first moments of awe which the presence of death causes to the most indifferent person, her first reflection had been that she could now marry him.

But her second and wiser was that it would be ridicu-

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ious to do anything of the kind. Poor Harry was as poor as the traditional church mouse. The little he had ever been worth had been squeezed out of him by Cocky and herself. She wanted money, an endless amount of money. Women of the world want money as orchids want moisture. They cannot live except with their feet ankle deep in a pactalus. Money, or its equivalent credit, is the necessity of their existence. Her existence, hitherto, however brilliant on the surface, had been little better than a series of shifty expedients. She had danced her shawl dance on the brink of exposure and bankruptcy. What was the use of marrying a man with whom the same, or still worse, embarrassments would have perpetually to be endured?

At no time had she been ready to throw herself away on Harry. She had been for several years fonder of him than she had ever supposed herself capable of being of anyone. When he had showed the least inclination for any other woman, her sentiment for him had become violent and ferocious in its sense of wronged ownership. But to marry him would be, she knew—she had always known—a grotesque mistake.

It would be one of those follies which are never forgiven by Fate. Harry was no more meant for marriage, she thought, as she sat alone in her morning room, than that wheelbarrow was meant for use. It was a charming wheelbarrow in satin, scarlet, and green, with gilded wheels and handles; filled with cherries, plumbs, currants, and strawberries made by the first bonbon-makers of Paris, and sent at Easter, the week before the old duke died. One might just as well roll that barrow over the stones to Covent Garden market, as think of marriage with Harry.

If she had been rich she would not have married again at all; men were crochetty worrying bores whenever you saw much of them, but to go on like this under Ronald's and the Ormes's tutelage, and next to nothing to amuse herself with, was wholly out of the question.

A vindictive dislike rose up in her against Jack. He was everything and she was nothing. This absurd rosy-faced monkey was lord of all; this little curly-headed imp in his man-o'-war suit was owner of everything and she

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of nothing, or of next to nothing; she felt an unreasonable and most unjust impatience at the very sight of his round laughing face and his sunny Correggio curls; and he avoided her as a puppy avoids a person who kicks it or scowls at it.

"Can't mammy be nasty? Oh, can't she!" he said to his confidant Harry, who frowned and answered:

"It's blackguard of her if she's nasty to *you*."

Harry himself was dull. On due consideration of his position he had felt no doubt whatever that he would have to marry Jack's mother.

Cocky had been his best friend; had Cocky's duration of life depended on him the Seventh Duke of Otterbourne would have seen a green old age.

"Bother it all," thought the poor fellow, "and I must say something about it to her, I suppose. Oh, damn it! It's telling a man in Newgate that he must settle the day for his own hanging!"

His world supposed him still to be very much in love with Jack's mother, but the prospect of being wedded to her appalled him. "My granny always said she would end in doing it," he thought, recalling the prophetic wisdom of the aged Lady Luce.

Men as a rule are not remarkable for tact, especially in personal matters which touch on the affections, and he had less of that valuable instinct than most people. Unaware that the lady of his destiny had mentally weighed him in the balance with the satin wheelbarrow, and found him wanting like the wheelbarrow in solidity, he was tormented by the feeling that he ought to speak to her on the subject and the indefinable reluctance which held him back from doing so.

The position of a man who has to marry a lady with whom his name has long been associated before his world can never be agreeable. He is conscious of paying over again in gold for what he has long ago bought with paper. He is aware that lookers-on laugh in their sleeve.

It requires the *beaux restes* of a veritable passion, the perennial charm of an undying sympathy, to make the most loyal of lovers accept without flinching so conspicuous and questionable a position.

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To her, it is triumph as to the master builder when the gilded vane crowns the giddy height of the steeple. She shows that she has kept her man well in hand, and ridden him with science to the finish. Beside, the shyest of women always likes what compromises and compliments her.

But the masculine mind is differently constituted; it sincerely dislikes being talked about, it still more dislikes to be laughed at, and when it is English, it is, on matters of the affections, uncommonly shy.

The necessity of broaching this delicate matter weighed heavily on Brancepeth's spirits; he did not know how to set about it, and he felt that it was at once ungracious to her to delay and unfeeling to poor buried Cocky to hasten the necessary avowal. He was always thankful when he found other people with her, and equally thankful that her respect for appearances had caused her to relax her demands on his attendance and affection ever since her return from the interments at Staghurst. One day, however, some six weeks after Cocky's disappearance from a world of poker and pick-me-ups, Brancepeth found himself alone with the fair mourner to whom crape was so infinitely becoming.

To this poor fellow, in whose breast the primitive feelings of human nature were planted too deeply for the ways of his world to have uprooted them, the idea of having the children with him, in his own house, seeing them every day and watching them grow up, was one which consoled him for being forced to sacrifice his liberty. Of course, they would always be Cocky's children to the world and in "Burke," but if he were their mother's husband nobody would think it odd if he made much of them, and took them to ride in the Row, or went with them to see a pantomime, or hired a houseboat for them, and taught them how to scull; simple joys which smiled at him from the future. Their mother would always be what she always had been. He had no illusions about her; he would have to give her her head whether he liked it or not; but the children—Harry saw himself living very properly, as a married man, in a little house off the Park, and getting every now and then "a day out" with

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Jack on the river. He would leave the Guards, he reflected, and pull himself together; he had next to nothing of his own left, but some day or other he would be Lord Inversay, and then, though it would always be a beggarly business, for the estates were mortgaged to their last sod of grass, he would try to make things run as straight as he could for sake of these merry little men who were Cocky's children. Occupied with such innocent and purifying thoughts, he had arrived in Stanhope Street.

It was a soft grey day in early May, and her room was a bower of lilac, heliotrope, and tea-roses. The Blenheims were quiet, for Cocky annoyed them no more. The tempered light fell through silk blinds on to the charming figure of their lady, as she lay back on a long low chair, her black robes falling softly about her as if she were some Blessed Damozel, or Lady of Tears, of Rossetti's or Burne-Jones's. Only between her lips was a cigarette and on her knee was a volume of Gyp's. Harry, good soul, was not awake to the incongruity; he only thought how awfully fetching she was, and yet he groaned in spirit. But after a few preliminary nothings, with much the same desperate and unpleasant resolve as that with which he had gone up to be birched at Eton, he opened his lips and spoke.

"I say," he murmured with timidity—"I say, dear, I have wanted to ask you ever since—I suppose—I mean, of course, I understand, now you are free you will want me to—wish me to—I mean we shall have to get married, shan't we, when the year's out?"

When these words had escaped him he was sensible that they were not complimentary, that they were not at all what he ought to have said, and a vague sensation of fright stole over him and he felt himself turn pale.

Into the blue eyes of Mouse that terrible lightning flashed which had withered up his courage very often as flame licks up dry grass. Then her sense of humor was stronger then her sense of offence; she took her cigarette out of her mouth and laughed with a genuine peal of musical laughter which was not affected. He stared at her, relieved, but in his turn offended. After all, he

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thought, it was not every man who would have ridden so straight up to the fence of duty and taken it so gallantly.

"My dear Harry," she said, rather slightingly, when her mirth had subsided, "I have had to listen to many declarations in my time, but—but I never had one so eloquent, so delicate, so opportune as yours. Pray will you tell me why I should be supposed to want to marry you, as you chivalrously express it?"

"It's usual," he answered sulkily, not daring to express the astonishment with which her tone and manner filled him.

"What is usual?" she asked, looking straight at him with serene imperturbable coolness and entire refusal to meet him half way by any kind of comprehension.

"Well, it *is*, you know that," he replied, looking down on the carpet.

"Usual for a woman to marry again seven weeks after her husband's death? I never heard so. I believe there is a country where a widow does marry all her husband's brothers one after another, as fast as she can, but that country is not England."

She put her cigarette back into her mouth again.

He looked at her apprehensively and shyly as Jack did very often from under his long lashes. He was puzzled and he was humiliated. He had brought himself up with a rush to do what he thought honor and all the rest of it required of him, and his self-sacrifice was not even appreciated but derided.

"I thought, of course, you'd desire it on account of the children," he said stupidly, insanely, for he should have known that truths like this cannot be told to women with any possibility of pardon to the teller of them.

She looked at him with an admirably imitated astonishment.

"For the children? For Cocky's children? I am really unable to guess why."

"Oh, damnation!"

The rude word escaped him despite himself; he rose and walked to and fro across the room trying to keep down the very unreasonable passion which burned within him.

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"Pray sit down—or go out," said Mouse calmly, and she lighted a fresh cigarette at the little silver lighter.

Brancepeth's eyes filled with tears. He was wounded and unnerved. The amazing impudence of woman which always so completely outstrips and eclipses the uttermost audacity of man stunned his feebler and tender organization. She was really still fond of him, though his savor, as of forbidden fruit, was gone, and the stupid veracity and *naïveté* of his character irritated and bored her.

"My dear Harry, don't be so upset," she said in a kinder tone. "There are things which should never be said. Walls have ears. The Chinese are quite right. If a thing is not to be told do not tell it. It is quite natural you should like Cocky's children since you were such friends with him and me; but you sometimes make too much fuss with them, especially in the nurseries. Children are so soon spoilt."

Brancepeth looked at her from under his sleepy eyelids with something near akin to contempt.

"The doors are shut," he said sullenly, "and there's nobody on the balconies. Can't we speak without bosh for once? The poor devil's dead. Can't we let his name alone? He was a bad lot, certainly, but we didn't try to make him better. He wasn't a fool; he must have known, you know——"

She roused herself from her reclining attitude, and her fair features were very set and stern.

"He is dead, as you observe. Ordinary intelligence would therefore suggest that it does not in the least matter what he did know and what he didn't know. Being dead he yet speaketh, cannot happily be said of Cocky. He has tormented me by setting Ronnie over me and the children, but that is the only annoyance he had the wit to inflict."

"Ronnie'll do his duty."

"Of course he will. People always do their duty when it consists in being disagreeable to others."

"Answer me, Mouse," said Brancepeth, bringing his walk to an end immediately in front of her. "I want to know, you know. Shall we marry or not? Don't beat about the bush. Say 'yes' or 'no.'"

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She blew some perfumed smoke in the air, then, in a very chilly and cutting tone, replied:

"Most distinctly: no."

"And why not?" said Brancepeth, feeling an irrational offence, although a moment before he had dreaded receiving an affirmative answer.

"My dear Harry, we are both as poor as church mice. If you can't pay your own tailors how would you pay mine?"

"We should get along somehow."

"Oh, thanks! I have had nearly ten years of 'getting along somehow,' and it is an extremely uncomfortable and crablike mode of moving. I hope to have no more of it. It takes it out of one. I shall marry again, of course. But I shall marry money."

He, still standing in front of her, gazed down on her gloomily. Certainly he had been keenly and nervously apprehensive that she would expect to marry him—would insist on marrying him; but now that she so decidedly refused to do so the matter took another aspect in his eyes. A vague sullen sense of offended and repudiated ownership rose up in him; it is a sentiment extremely tenacious, unreasonable, and aggressive, whether it be agrarian or amorous. He did not say anything; words were not very abundant with him, but he continued to look down on her gloomily.

Marry money!

And the man with money would have all this charming fair beauty of hers, and would have Jack and the others in his nurseries: and he himself—where would he be? Done with; rubbed off the slate; struck out of the running; allowed to do a theatre with her now and then perhaps, and see Jack and the others on their ponies in the ride of a morning—where was the good of Cocky having died? He wished with all his soul that Cocky had not died. Things had been so comfortable with poor old Cocky.

He was accustomed to consider himself as a part of her property; for nearly ten years she had disposed of his time, his circumstance, and his resources; he had always been at her beck and call, and the nurseries had been

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his recompense; he was stunned to be flung off in this way like any stranger. She saw that he was angry, more angry than he knew. She guessed all the various feelings which were at work within him; they were clearer to her than to himself. She was fond of him; she did not wish to lose him entirely; there was nobody else she liked so much, nobody else so extremely good-looking. She administered an opiate after the severe wound she had given.

"You goose!" she said softly, whilst her blue eyes smiled caressingly upon him. "You are too terribly tragic to-day. Do look at things in their right form, dear; you must see that however much we might like it we can't possibly afford to marry each other. We might as well want to drive a team of giraffes down Piccadilly. We have nothing to marry upon, and we are both of us people who require a good deal. Besides, society will expect us to marry, and for that reason alone I wouldn't. It would be *de me donner dans le tort.* I shall marry somebody extremely rich. I don't know who yet, but somebody, I promise you, who shall be nice to you, dear; just as nice as poor Cocky was, and somebody who won't be always wanting five pounds as Cocky was, but, on the contrary, will be able to lend five hundred if you wish for it."

The future she so delicately suggested seemed to her so seductive that she expected it to fully satisfy her companion. But he saw it in another and a less favorable aspect. His handsome face grew dark as a thunder-cloud and his teeth shut tightly together. He stood before her, staring down on her.

"The devil take you and all your soft speeches!" he said, through his clenched teeth. "You are an out and out bad woman. That's what you are. If you weren't their mother I would——."

His voice choked in his throat. He turned quickly, took up his hat and cane from the chair he had left them on, and went out of the room without looking behind him. He closed the door roughly and ran down the staircase.

A youthful philosopher in powder and black shoulder-knots, who was on duty at the head of the stairs, looked

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after his retreating figure with placid derision. "She's wanting him to be spliced to her and he won't hear of it," thought the youth; but even philosophers in powder, whose Portico is the vestibule of a fashionable London house, sometimes err in their conclusions.

Fury, as though it were the drug *curare*, held her motionless and speechless as she heard the door close behind her self-emancipated slave. The common coarse language of the streets used to her! She could not believe her ears. Her rage stifled her. She could scarcely breathe. The Blenheims were frightened at her expression and went under a sofa. She took the satin wheelbarrow—she did not know why, except that it was associated in her thoughts with him—and she broke it, and tore it, and flung its contents all over the room, and trampled on the gilded wheel and handles till they were mere glittering splinters and shivers. That exercise of violence did her good, the blood ceased to buzz in her ears, her nerves grew calmer; she would willingly have killed someone or something, but even this destruction of a toy did her good, it was better than nothing, it relaxed the tension of her nerves. It had allowed her a little of that violent physical action which is the instinct of even civilized human nature when it is offended or outraged.

When she was a little calmer and could reflect, she thought she would tell his commanding officer and demand his punishment; she thought she would tell the Prince of Wales and entreat his exclusion from Marlborough House and Sandringham; she thought she would tell the editor of *Truth*, and beg him to have a paragraph about it. Then, as she grew calmer still, she became aware that she could tell nobody at all anything whatever. If the world knew that Harry had used bad words to her, the world would immediately ask what tether had been given to Harry that he had ever so greatly dared.

"The coward, the coward!" she said, in her teeth. "He knows I can't even have him thrashed by another man."

His crime against her seemed to her monstrous. It was indeed of the kind which no woman forgives. It was the

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cruellest of all insults; one which was based upon fact. To her own idea she had very delicately and good-naturedly intimated to her friend that she would arrange her future so that their relation should be as undisturbed as in the past. If that did not merit a man's gratitude, what did? Yet, instead of thanks, he had spoken to her as she had not supposed women were spoken to outside the Haymarket or the Rat Mort.

She never admitted to herself that she did wrong; much less had she ever permitted anyone else to hint that she did so. A bad woman! Ladies like herself can no more conceive such a phrase being used to describe them than a winner of the Oaks could imagine herself between a costermonger's shafts. All that they do is ticketed under pretty or pleasant names on the shelves of their memories; tact, friendship, amusement, sympathy, convenience, amiability, health, one or other of these nice sounding words labels every one of their motives or actions. To class themselves with "bad people" never enters their minds for a moment; Messalina would certainly never have dreamed of being classed with the horizontales of the Suburra. What made it worse was that she was still fond of him, though he often bored her. She would have given ten years of life to have had his face under her foot and to have stamped it into blurred ugliness as she had stamped the wheelbarrow into atoms. But these fierce simple pleasures, alas! are only allowed to the women of the Haymarket and the Rat Mort.

She had done incalculable harm to Harry; she had worried, enslaved, and tormented the best years of his life; she had impoverished him utterly, she had stripped him of the little he had ever possessed, she had driven him into debt which would hang about his neck like a millstone to the day of his death; she had turned a simple and honest nature into devious and secret ways; she had made him lie, and laughed at him when he had been ashamed of lying; she had done him a world of harm, and in return he had only said five little rude words to her. But his offence seemed to her so enormous that if she had possessed the power she would have had him beaten with rods or roasted at a slow fire. That she had been his

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worst enemy she would never have admitted for one instant, never have supposed that anyone could think it. She considered that she had made him supremely happy during a very long period, that if she had ever given him cause for jealousy he had never known it, which is all that a well-bred man should expect; and that he had enjoyed the supreme felicity of being associated in her home life, of knowing all her worries and annoyances, and of being allowed to make an ass of himself in the nurseries in a simili-domestic fashion which was just suited to his simple tastes as a simili-bronze of a classic statuette is suited to the narrow purse of a tourist. His ingratitude seemed to her so vile, so enormous, that the immensity of her own wrongs made her submit to bear them in silence out of admiration of her own magnanimity and the serenity of her own certitude that she would avenge herself somehow or other to the smallest iota.

She rang the bell, which was answered by a colleague of the young philosopher in powder of the anteroom. "The dogs have torn up this bonbon thing," she said, pointing to the wreck of the ruined wheelbarrow. "Take it away and bring me some luncheon in here; only a quail and some plover eggs and some claret; order the carriage for three o'clock."

She felt exhausted from the extreme violence of her anger and the infamy of the affront she had received; and were Phedre or Dido or Cleopatra living on the brink of the twentieth century no one of them would any day go without her luncheon. They would know that their emotions "took it out" of them, that their nervous system was in danger when their affections are disturbed; they would know all about neurasthenia and marasma, and however angry or unhappy for Hippolytus, for Æneas, or for Anthony, would remember that they were organisms very easily put out of order, machines which require very regular nutrition; they would be fully conscious of the important functions of their livers, and would regulate their passions so as not to interfere with their digestions.

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CHAPTER XXIII.

WHEN she had ended her repast with two hot-house nectarines, her brother was announced, to her great vexation. She never saw Ronnie very willingly and now less willing than ever, for his position with regard to her and her children was one which could not have made him a *persona gratâ* even had he been less outspoken and uncompromising than he was. At the present moment he was especially unwelcome to her; but as he had come upstairs disregarding the servants' endeavors to induce him to wait while they inquired their mistress's pleasure, he had entered the room before she had quite finished her second nectarine, and it was impossible to order him to go away as he came. He had come on business.

There was a great deal of business concerning little Jack's succession, the many burdens already laid thereon, and the various projects which were in consideration for turning to the best account the long minority. Then there were her own jointure, her own rights and claims, her own debts. The views which he had been afforded from time to time of hers and Cocky's affairs had been but partial; nothing had ever been completely divulged to him, neither Cocky or she could ever tell the exact truth—it was not in them. Therefore, although Hurstmanceaux had known a good deal of their embarrassments he had not known many matters which now appalled him when they came before him in the dry, cold prose of legal fact, and he had not spared his sister the complete expression of his supreme amazement and supreme disgust.

Their interviews were therefore neither gay nor cordial, and she did not assume a contentment which she was so far from feeling, as his entrance made the claret seem corked and the nectarine seem sour.

After the statement of the especial piece of legal business which had brought him there that morning, the letting on a long lease of the dower-house at Staghurst, for

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which her signature was necessary, Hurstmanceaux, standing on the hearth in the same attitude he had assumed when he had recommended Black Hazel, said very simply and very curtly to her:

"You let the dower-house instead of living in it. Will you tell me where you do mean to live?"

She frowned; she hated direct questions, they were so ill-bred.

"Live?" she repeated. "Oh, I don't know at all. Of course I shall be a good deal here——"

"By here do you mean in this house?"

"I dare say—I don't know; I have not thought about it."

"You had better think. The rent of this house is fifteen hundred a year. Happily it was only taken by the year. I have told them it will not be required next year."

"Very officious of you!" she said with a chilly smile. "I have a right to Otterbourne House."

"Not the smallest right."

"That is absurd."

"It is law."

"Is it true you have let it to Mannheim?"

"Quite true."

Mannheim was the ambassador of the Russian Emperor.

"All these things are no concern of yours," said Hurstmanceaux gravely. "Pray give your attention to what does concern you. Your jointure is a narrow one. Out of it you should surrender two thousand a year for twenty years to pay off your personal debts. How can you keep on any London house on what will be left to you? Of course the children live with you and bring you in something, but very little, for there is next to nothing at present; the charges on the estate are so heavy, as we demonstrated to you the other day. What will you do if you can't break yourself in to some sort of economy and sacrifice?"

She deigned no reply. She had really none ready. She was only intensely, bitterly, furiously angry. If she could not live in the way she liked she did not care to live at all.

She was very pale, with the pallor of deep anger; her lips were white and her blue eyes dark and flashing. How

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she hated everybody! How above all she hated that little dead beast who had left her tied hand and foot like this!

"Surely you must see," her brother said with pain, "that in the position in which I stand toward you I must be more strict with you, my sister, than it might be necessary to be with a stranger?"

"How exactly like your priggish humbug!" she cried furiously. "Nobody else would take such a view. What is the use of connections if they don't make things smooth?"

"I am well aware that it is the only purpose of my own existence in your eyes," said Hurstmanceaux; "you have taught me that long ago. But I am afraid you will find others less indulgent than I have been, and I am sorry to say, whether you understand it or not, I cannot myself be indulgent to you at the expense of your sons."

She gave an impatient gesture. "You always get on your moral hobbyhorse," she said insolently. "I believe there was never such a prig in all creation. I wish you would go away. You are wasting for me all this fine morning."

There was silence between them. Hurstmanceaux broke it by a question he was half afraid to put.

"I have to apologize for asking you, but I should be glad to know—I suppose you mean to marry Brancepeth?"

She threw back her head and looked at him with distended nostrils breathing defiance.

"Pray why should I marry Lord Brancepeth?"

Hurstmanceaux hesitated; he was astonished and embarrassed.

"Well, everybody expects you to do so; it would be natural and proper that you should; it is the only thing you can do to—to——"

He paused; he had never spoken to her of Brancepeth, it hurt him to do so; he grew red with embarrassment for her. He could not have used any words which could have stung, infuriated and embittered her more than these unfortunate and far too candid phrases. Coming after the scene of an hour before, they were like petroleum poured on a leaping flame.

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"Lord Brancepeth did me the honor to offer me his hand a few minutes ago; I refused it," she said between her teeth. "I am entirely at a loss to know why you and 'everybody' consider that I ought to marry a penniless guardsman who has nothing to recommend him but a handsome face."

"By heaven! That's cool."

Hurstmanceaux, as he muttered the involuntary words, stared down on her too astonished to say more, too completely stupefied and taken aback to be aware of the indelicacy of his own astonishment.

"Have you any more suggestions to make?" she said with her utmost insolence.

"Unhappily, I have to speak to you about a very unpleasant thing," said Hurstmanceaux and paused.

"You never speak of anything that is not unpleasant by any chance," said his sister. "Pray unburden yourself."

"Well then," said Hurstmanceaux, not softened by her manner, "briefly, I must ask you to be so good as to give up the family jewels out of your keeping; the bank will send for them by our orders on Monday."

She was prepared for the question.

"I have always had the use of them," she replied very calmly, "precedent makes possession."

"No, it does not. The late duke never gave you by signature, nor before witnesses, any interest in them or any right of user. He let you wear them as he might have lent me a horse, but the horse having been lent to me would not have become mine through that loan. The jewels are tied up by settlement, and go with the real estate. Your husband renewed that settlement on his deathbed and the jewels go to Jack with the rest of the real estate. Do I make myself clear?"

"The little beast!" said Jack's mother between her teeth.

"I do not know why you should call your child bad names. He is *your* child, there can be no doubt about that. Failing Jack, his brother succeeds. It is not Jack personally who causes you this annoyance, it is the settlement under his father and grandfather's will. It would

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be just the same if you had no sons and if Lord Alberic succeeded."

Mouse gave a fierce, nervous, impatient gesture.

"Why was I allowed to have the jewels, then, at all if I am to be made ridiculous by having them taken away from me?"

"It would have been better if you had not had them, no doubt. But the duke was always good-natured and indulgent, and your husband was of course perfectly aware that the jewels were protected by settlement; he renewed the settlement on his deathbed. Besides, the great Indian diamond is not an ordinary jewel—it is a fortune in itself."

She was prepared for this or some similar remark and did not flinch.

"It is precisely that which is so annoying," she replied. "That jewel is so conspicuous; to appear without it at a drawing-room or any function of any importance would be absurd—odious. Surely some way can be found to leave me the usage of them until the boy's majority?"

"No way at all," said Hurstmanceaux sternly. "They will go to Coutts's, and stay there until his majority. By the way, where are they now?"

"In my jewel safe," she answered sullenly.

"What imprudence!"

"It has a Chubb's lock."

"Why did you not keep them at the bank? Nobody wears such jewels as these every evening."

"I wear them very often."

Something aggressive in her tone aroused her brother.

"You will not wear them any more," he said harshly. "You must learn to realize that they do not belong to you."

"I shall dispute that fact before the court."

"What court?"

"I do not know yet, but some court—some court which sees to such things."

"Pray be reasonable. You have not an inch of ground to stand on; there is the settlement renewed every generation; the jewels are chattels and the chattels are devised to the heir; they go with the dukedom."

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"I shall see Mr. Gregge."

"Pray do. Mr. Gregge is not a very scrupulous man, but he is a man of sense, and he will not tell you to run your head against a stone wall."

"If he do not do his duty, I shall employ someone else."

"No decent attorney in the three kingdoms would take up such a case. You have no more title to the Otterbourne jewels than the woman selling primroses at the corner of the street."

"So *you* say."

"It is not what I say, it is what the law says; what the dead men's wills say; what the Lord Chancellor himself would say if he were asked. You are a person accustomed to do whatever you like and to bewitch any man who approaches you, but you will find there are some things stronger than yourself, and one of them is the common law of England, which in this instance is dead against you."

With these words he rose.

Then, with one of those audacious inspirations which might have made her a great general had she been a man, she added between her teeth—

"Perhaps you would like to see them and convince yourself of their safety? Will you come to my room? The safe is screwed to its stand."

She spoke without apprehension because she knew that the false diamonds would defy detection by any one except an expert. Hurstmanceaux was reassured by the frankness of the offer.

"No, oh, no!" he said less coldly. "I will of course take your word for it that they are all there."

"You are really too confiding," said his sister very contemptuously. She rose also with tightened teeth, dilated nostrils, flashing eyes. "Your conduct is infamous! To insult your own sister!"

"There is no insult," said Hurstmanceaux. "An honest woman would not want to be asked twice to give up what is not her own."

"Out of my presence!" she cried with a shrill sound in her voice like that of the wind as it rises in storm.

"With pleasure," said her brother very coldly. "To-

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morrow is Sunday. On Monday at ten o'clock in the morning they will come from the bank for the jewels, and you will consult your own interests best by giving them up without more of this folly; we shall have them valued afresh by Hunt and Roskell, for values change with time."

"Out of my presence, and never dare to enter it again so long as you live!" she said with fury, whilst she twisted her handkerchief between her hands as though it were Jack's little throat that she was strangling.

Hurstmanceaux shrugged his shoulders, bowed to her slightly, and went out of the room.

To a more suspicious man the impression that she had some worse motive for her opposition than a mere vain reluctance to part with these ornaments would have suggested itself; but he was not suspicious, and he knew that women of her type would sell their souls to be smarter than their neighbors.

"Cocky only put me in his will," he thought ruefully, "because he knew that I was up to her tricks, and should put the curb on her for the young un's sake."

He did his duty loyally; but the doing of it was extremely disagreeable to him. He could not help being fond of her; he never could wholly forget the time when she had been a little, saucy, lovely, bewitching child, resting her golden curls on his shoulder when he went home from Eton or Oxford.

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CHAPTER XXIV.

When he went downstairs he summoned the major-domo into the library on the ground floor, where Cocky's sporting literature still strewed the tables.

"Mason, her Grace leaves this house on the first of July," he said to that functionary.

"Very good, my lord," said Mason, with impassable countenance.

"You see, Mason," continued Ronald, "the duchess is of course in a very altered position; if the duke had lived——"

"Quite so, my lord," said Mason, who thought: "Bless us and save us! If he had, everything would have gone in the smelting-pot."

"Her establishment will be much diminished; I am afraid she will be obliged to relinquish your services and those of others."

"Oh, my lord," said Mason with a respectful little gesture which implied that persons like himself were always in demand at all seasons, and that the loss would be her Grace's, not his.

"Well, you will see that everything is packed up that belongs to the family, and you will see that the house is put in due order to be given up to its owners on the last day of the month; for your wages and those of the others you will go to the late duke's lawyers."

Mr. Mason's face clouded haughtily at the word wages, but he was a good-hearted man—he did not openly resent.

"I beg pardon, my lord," he said with hesitation, "but does her Grace know she leaves the house?"

"Yes," said Ronald. "That is, she knows she must leave it."

"And do you think she will, my lord?"

"She must!"

Mason shook his head.

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"The duchess never does what is not agreeable to her, my lord."

"She must leave it; and you must see that preparations are duly made, so that she cannot remain in it."

Mr. Mason coughed slightly.

"My lord, I have heard that there are tenants in Ireland who will not go out till the thatch is set afire over their heads, and even then let themselves and their pigs be burnt rather than give up possession. I mean no disrespect, my lord, when I venture to say that my lady—I mean her Grace—is very much of that kind of temper, my lord."

"I know she is," said Hurstmanceaux. "That is why I speak to you on this matter. Go out of the house she must."

"Of course I will do my best, my lord," said Mason in a dubious tone; he knew if her Grace did not choose anything to be packed up nothing would be.

At that moment Cecile, the head maid, entered; she was a tall, supercilious, conceited-looking Swiss woman of forty.

"If you please, my lord," she said, looking impudently in Ronald's face, "her Grace would be glad to know when you mean to go out of the house, as her Grace is waiting to come downstairs."

Hurstmanceaux turned his back on her.

"You have received my orders, Mason. The landlord resumes possession here on the last day of the month."

Then he went into the hall and out of the house door.

"*Quel ours!*" said Cecile, with her nose in the air. She liked gentlemen like the foreign diplomatist who had gone to see the Battersea birds.

Mr. Mason shook his head in a melancholy manner.

"I think we had better all of us leave," he said gloomily. "The Miser's got the purse-strings now and the duchess aren't anywhere."

"*Moi, j' resterai*," said the Swiss woman. "She does hit one with the hairbrush sometimes and pretty hard too, but she is first-rate fun, and always leaves her letters about, and never knows what she has or she hasn't. Take my word for it, Mr. Mason, *she* will always live in clover."

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"I dare say she will," said the more virtuous Mason. "But it won't be correct, now Cocky's gone; and myself I shall give her the go-by."

Their mistress meanwhile was walking up and down her morning-room, a prey to many torturing and conflicting thoughts. She knew that she had done an unwise and an ill-bred thing in sending that message by Cecile to her brother, but her rage had outstripped her prudence. Ronald was the best friend she had, and she had proved it a thousand times; but an ungovernable hatred seethed within her against him. He and Harry—she did not know which she hated the more, which of the two had insulted her the more infamously. A woman may lose all title to respect, but that is no reason why she does not retain every pretension to it.

Nothing could ever have persuaded her that she had lost her right to have everyone hold her in the highest esteem. Nevertheless, she had sense enough to be aware that she was in a very odious position, and that she might very easily be in one which would be absolute disgrace, one which would place her on the level with those poor simpletons whom she had always scorned so immeasurably, women who had lost their natural position and were nowhere at home, and could only get received at Florence tea-tables and Homburg picnics and Monaco supper parties. She had always thought that she would sooner die than be put in the basket with the *pêches à quinze* series. For she was intensely proud, and had made many a poor woman who had been compromised feel the weight of her disdain and the sting of her cruelty. She always intended to enjoy herself, to do exactly whatever she pleased, but she never intended to lose her right to present Boo ten years hence at the Drawing-room. People who did lose their place were idiots. So she had always thought, but at the present moment she was obliged to feel that she might very easily lose her place herself.

Beaumont had frightened her, but he had not frightened her so intensely as had her brother; and, as he had given her six months' time, she had with her usual happy *insouciance* almost dismissed the peril from her mind. But she knew her brother's character and she knew that he

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would send the men from the bank at the time fixed as punctually as the clock would strike eleven. And then from the bank he would send the jewels to Hunt and Roskell, and that admirable imitation of the roc's egg, which would deceive the unaided eye of anyone, would be detected in its falseness by their acids or their wheels or whatever the things were with which jewelers tested diamonds. And then he, despite his unsuspicious stupidity, would know, without any further proof, that she had pawned or sold the original.

"I am at home to no one," she said to her footman, and continued to walk up and down the room in nervous agitation.

She had several engagements, such engagements as her mourning allowed, but she ignored them all; she could not see anyone until she could find out some way of exit from this hideous labyrinth of trouble.

Suddenly it flashed upon her mind that, do what she would, she could not get the diamond in time for Monday morning. It was in Paris. If she went to Paris without the money she would be no nearer to it; and besides, her sudden departure would at once awaken the suspicions of Jack's guardians. She must not only find the large sum of money needed, but she must also find someone who would go to Paris and bring the stone back before Monday forenoon.

There were many men who were devoted to her, but as she ran over their names in her mind she could think of no one whose adoration, whether expectant or retrospective, would be equal to such a strain on it as that; nor every one to whom she could quite safely trust her secret.

There are very pretty theories and ideals about the honor of men of the world, but she knew such men down to the ground, as she would have phrased it, and she had few illusions about their honor. She knew that when they are in love with one woman they show up to that one all the others who have preceded her in their affections. Harry, indeed, she might have trusted; but she had broken with him, and even if she had not done so, he could no more have raised a seventh part of the money than he could have uprooted St. James's Palace. He was

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stone broke, as he said himself. Her little travelling timepiece, which stood on her writing-table, seemed to sway over the seconds and minutes with a fiendish rapidity. Half-an-hour had gone by since her brother had left her, and she was no nearer a solution to her torturing difficulties. Other women would have weakened and compromised themselves by running to some female confidant, but she had none; with her own sisters she was always on the terms of an armed neutrality and in female friends she had never seen any object or savor. As soon as a woman was intimate with you she only tried to take your men away from you; she never gave any woman the opportunity to do so.

Another quarter of an hour passed by; she heard her horses stamping on the stones beneath the windows; she heard the children scamper down the staircase on their way to their afternoon walk in the park; she heard people drive up and drive away as they were met by the inexorable "Not at home" of the good-looking youth in powder and black shoulder-knots who opened the hall door.

How horrible! she thought, oh, how horrible! This might be the very last day on which anybody would call on her! For she knew well enough that the offence she had committed was one which, once made public, would close to her the only world for which she cared. "And yet I really meant no harm," she thought. "I thought the thing was mine or would be. Why did that odious Poodle lend it me? So treacherous! Why did he not explain to me that it was a 'chattel'? What is a chattel? Why did Beaumont advance the money upon it? He was much more to blame than I am, because of course he knew the law."

In that she was perhaps not wrong, for though the world may blame only the borrower, the lender is not seldom the wickeder of the two.

Tired out with her ceaseless pacing to and fro over the carpet, her nerve gave way, and for almost the first time in her life she burst into tears, bitter, hysterical, cruel tears, the tears which disfigure and age the woman who sheds them. The Blenheims, infinitely distressed, jumped on her lap and endeavored to console her; rubbing their

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little red and white heads against her cheeks. Their caresses touched her in her loneliness. "We hated Cocky, you and I," she said to them; "but I wish to heaven he had never died." With all her keen enjoyment of life she really understood in that hour of torture how it was that women driven at bay killed themselves to escape detection and condemnation. She did not mean to kill herself because she was a woman of many resources and had her beautiful face and form, and loved life; but she felt that she would rather kill herself than meet Ronald's eyes if he learned that the Indian diamond had been changed and pawned. And know it he must as soon as Hunt and Roskell's assayer tested the stones. Beaumont had told her honestly that the imitation would deceive anyone, even a jeweler, unless it were tested; but that tested it would of course fly in pieces and confess itself a fraud.

She had only forty-three hours before the messenger from the bank would come. Whatever she did had to be done before the stones were consigned to him, for after they were out of her possession she would not be safe for a moment. At all costs she must get back the roc's egg from Beaumont or be a ruined, disgraced, miserable woman. True, she felt sure that her brother and the Ormes would not expose her to the world. They would scrape the money together at all costs, and redeem the jewel, and observe secrecy on the whole abominable affair; but she would be in their power for ever; they would be able to punish her in any way they chose, and their punishment would certainly take the form of exiling her from everything which made life worth living.

The old churchman, Lord Augustus, was hardly more than a lay figure, but Alberic, she knew, looked on her with all the disdain and dislike of a refined and religious man, for one whom he condemned in all her ways and whom he considered had made his brother and his father dupes from the first day of her marriage. And Ronald would be but the more bitterly inflexible because he would consider that her near relationship to himself compelled him in honor to the uttermost severity in judgment and action; he would consider that he could not show to her the indulgence he might have shown to a stranger.

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Her fit of weeping exhausted itself by its own violence, and as she glanced at her face in the glass she was horrified to see her red and swollen eyelids and her complexion smudged and dulled like a pastel which some ignorant servant has dusted.

"Nothing on earth is worth the loss of one's beauty," she said to herself, and she went upstairs and, without summoning her maid, washed her face with rosewater and ran a comb through her hair; the Blenheims sitting on either side of her, critical of processes with which they were familiar.

As she sat before her toilet-table and its oval silver-framed swinging mirror, her eyes fell by chance on a glove box made of tortoise shell and gold, with two gold amorini playing with a fawn on its lid.

"Billy!" she said suddenly, half aloud.

William Massarene had given her the box when she had betted gloves with him at the previous year's Goodwood races.

"Billy!" she said again under her breath.

Yes, there was Billy; the only person in the whole world who could do for her what she wanted without feeling it.

She would have to tell him, to make him understand the urgency of it, some portion of the truth; the blood rushed over her face with the repulsion of pride. Tell her necessities to the man she bullied and despised! She sat with her eyes fixed on the two gold cupids thinking how she could put the story so that she would not be lowered in his eyes. It was a difficult and embarrassing test of her ingenuity, for not only had she to get the money out of him but she must get him to send or to go to Paris by that evening's train. She had pillaged Massarene without shame or compunction. She had made him "bleed" without stint. She had made him do a thousand follies, costly to himself but useful to her, like the purchases of Blair Airon and Vale Royal. She had rooked him without mercy, considering that she did him an honor in noticing him at all. But, by some contradiction, or some instinct of pride or of decency, she shrank at the idea of actually borrowing money from him—of actually being indebted to him for a great service.

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In all lesser transactions with him she had considered him her debtor for her patronage; but to make him do this, to make him pay Beaumont and restore her the Indian stone, would be to become his debtor. There was no shirking the fact. Would she ever be able to bully and insult him afterwards? Yes, why not? He was a cad, a snob, a horror; such men were only made to be trodden on and have their ears boxed.

She decided that it did not matter what a low-bred brute like him knew or thought, and that since Providence had given her a rich idiot into her hands it would be worse than folly not to use his resources. Anything, anything, was better than to let the imitation jewel go to Hunt and Roskell for inevitable detection. And there were now only forty-three hours in which to act.

He was in town she knew. He was in town because she was in town, and because the House was sitting. Where should she see him?

To send for him to her residence might cause some story to get about; to go to Harrenden House was still more compromising unless she began by a visit to his wife, which would be round about and cause delay; she knew he might very possibly be at the Commons—new members are always very assiduous in their attendance—and he was at that time serving on a Royal Commission on some agricultural difficulty. She had herself dressed, feeling that Cecile looked curiously at her, and telling the woman to take the dogs in Kensington Gardens, she went to her carriage which had been waiting two hours.

"To Palace Yard!" she said to her footman: the horses, irritated in temper and with their mouths and necks in pain from their long penance in their bearing-reins, flew thither with the speed of the wind.

She sent for Mr. Massarene, who was, the doorkeeper said, in the House. After a few moments he came out to her with the deferential haste of an enamored man, which sat ill on his broad squat figure and his iron-grey, elderly, respectable, tradesmanlike aspect.

"I want to speak to you a moment," she said as he came and stood by the carriage. "Can you give me a cup of tea on the terrace?"

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"Certainly, certainly!" he stammered, confused by a dual sentiment—the charm of her presence and the fear that it would look odd to be seen with her. "The committee I am on has just ended its sitting," he added with the pride which he felt in his functions. "I shall be delighted if I can be of any use."

"There is no one there now, is there?" she asked, sensible as he was that her appearance in such a public place would look very strange.

"No one, or next to no one. No one of your friends, certainly. A few Radical members."

"They don't matter," she said, and went with him through the House to the terrace.

He gave her a seat and ordered tea. He was dazzled and intimidated as he always was by her presence, but he was conscious that her beguilements always ended in some advantage for herself, so that he was less flattered than he would otherwise have been by her sudden appeal to him.

It was a grey day, the river was in fog, but the air was windless and mild.

She threw back her veil and the pale light fell on the brightness of her hair, and the beauty of her face enhanced by the frame of crape. The traces of her weeping had passed away, leaving her face softer and whiter than usual with a tremor on the mouth like that of a little child who has been scolded.

William Massarene's observant eyes read those signs. "She's in some real sharp trouble this time, I reckon," he said to himself.

He was a man who had never known pity, but he did feel sorry for her.

She made the mistake of judging him from the exterior. Because he was afraid of her and of her friends, because he did not know how to bow, because he made ludicrous mistakes in language and manner, because he crumbled his bread on the dinner-cloth, and never used his finger-glass, she imagined him to be a fool.

She did not understand that if he let himself be robbed he did so with a purpose and not out of feebleness. She did not understand that, although he was hypnotized by

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her because he was under the influence of a woman for the first time, there was always alive underneath his obedience the sharp, keen, brutal selfishness which had made him the great man he was.

"What is the trouble, my lady?" he said, leaning forward, his hands on his knees in his usual attitude. "Why, lord, you're no more made for trouble than a white cockatoo's for mud and rain."

There was not a soul on the terrace; the attendant who had brought the tea-tray had retired; there was the scream and roar of a steam-tug coming up the river in the fog, and a factory bell on the opposite shore was clanging loudly: she thought she should hear those two sounds in her ears as long as ever she should live.

She knew that there was no time to lose, that the moments were tearing along like sleuth-hounds, that she must tell him now or never, must get his help or be ruined.

She was of high physical courage; she had slid from the back of a rearing horse; she had never lost her nerve on a yacht-deck in a storm, when men were washed overboard like chickens; she had been perfectly cool and self-possessed one awful night on a Highland mountain when she and her whole party had lost their way for twelve hours of snowdrift and hurricane; but now, for the first time in her life, she was nerveless, and felt her tongue cleave to the roof of her mouth and her spirit fail her.

"Come, keep up your pecker," said Mr. Massarene in what he meant to be a kindly encouragement. "Come, tell me what the matter is, my pretty one."

She started like a doe past whose side a bullet whistles as the odious familiarity struck her ear—the familiarity which she did not dare to resent, the familiarity which told her how much the expression of her face must have confessed already. With dilated nostrils, through which her breath came and went rapidly and in short pulsations, she plunged midmost into her story: the story as arranged and decorated and trimmed by her own intelligent skill, wherein she was plainly the victim of circumstance, of her own ignorance, of a tradesman's deceitfulness, and of her relatives' cruelty and harshness. The old duke, she averred, had given her the jewels; but it seemed there

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was nothing to show that he had done so, and her brother and brothers-in-law were so inconceivably base as to doubt her word for it, and to claim them for the heir as "real estate." No woman, she thought, had ever been so brutally treated in the whole history of the world.

She spoke at first hesitatingly and with visible embarrassment, but she grew more at her ease as she got her story well in hand, and she became eloquent in the description of her wrongs.

William Massarene followed her narrative attentively and without interruption, leaning a little forward with his hands on his knee and glancing round to see that no one was in sight to wonder at his flattering but compromising *tête-à-tête*. He was magnetized by her voice, dazzled by her eyes, but what she spoke of was a matter of business and he was beyond all else a man of business. Business was his own domain. On that he was master; in that it was not in the power of anyone to cheat him. His sharp perception quickly understood her position, disentangled facts from fiction, and comprehended in what danger she was placed. He did not let her see that he knew she was glossing over and changing the circumstances; but he did know it, and stripped the false from the true in his own reflections as surely as he had shifted gold from quartz in his days in the gold-fields. He could have turned her narrative inside out and rent it to pieces in a second, but he forbore to do so, and appeared to accept her version of the matter as she presented it to him.

"But what made you take the jewels to this Beaumont?" he asked her as she paused.

"I wanted money," she said sullenly.

"Was it before you knew me?"

"Just before."

"And you asked nobody's advice?"

"No."

The ghost of a grim smile flitted over his face: certainly for consummate folly he thought these great folks beat anything in all creation.

"Oh, don't laugh at one, Billy," she said with genuine mortification and shame in her voice. "You don't know what it is to want money as we do."

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He looked at her indulgently.

"I dare say it's hard on you. You have to keep up all that swagger on nothing. Well, as I understand the matter, you must have these diamonds before Monday forenoon, eh?"

"Yes," she said shortly, with a catch in her breath; she felt by the change in his tone how far she had descended from her pedestal by her confession. "Oh, the brute!" she thought passionately; "how I should love to strangle him and fling him into the Thames pea-soup!"

"What is it you want me to do?" he asked, whilst he knew without asking; but he liked "to keep her nose to the grindstone"; he was but paying in fair coin the innumerable insults she had passed on him, the countless awkward and painful moments she had entailed on him.

She took up all her courage and trusted to the magic of her influence over him.

"I want you to go over to Paris and get them for me. I dare say you could get them for half price. Beaumont would be afraid of you."

His face did not reveal his thoughts; his dull grey eyes stared at her fixedly.

"What was the sum you had from him?"

"Three hundred thousand francs; but then there is the cast of the false stones to add to that and the interest."

She spoke the truth in this, for she knew that it would be no use to do otherwise.

"And what did you sign for?"

"I can't remember."

William Massarene laughed, a short, rasping, grim sound, like the chuckle of the big woodpecker.

"Beaumont has a very good reputation," she added. "He never cheats. He was once a gentleman, they say."

"And gentlefolks never cheat, do they, my lady!"

"Oh, Billy, don't mock at me," she cried with genuine distress. "I am in horrible trouble. I have told you everything because you are my friend. Will you do this thing or won't you?"

"How will you pay me if I do?"

"Pay you!"

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In her heart of hearts she knew that she had not the remotest intention of ever paying him.

"How will you pay me if I do?" he repeated. A look came into his eyes as they stared on her which might have warned her that he was not a man who would go for ever unpaid. She was silent; she really did not know what to say. She knew that she hated him horribly. But she had no other chance.

He enjoyed her discomfiture.

"You'll pay me somehow, I reckon," he said, after leaving her in torture for a few moments. "Well, I'll do this thing for you. I'll go to Paris to-night. Send me a line from you authorizing me to treat for you with this jeweler. I'll get back to-morrow evening. You'll be at your house by ten o'clock, and I'll come there straight from Cannon Street. Mind you're alone."

The rough authority of the sentences chilled her to the bone; she realized that he was no more her timid obedient slave, but her master, and a master with a whip. Something in the expression of his face made her sick with fear. But there was no other means, no other saviour; if she offended him, if she rejected the aid she had asked for, the false stones would go to Hunt and Roskell, and her brother and brothers-in-law would know everything.

"You'd better go now," said William Massarene, reading in her mind as if it were a book. "This aren't a place to talk secrets; and pull your veil down, for you look out of sorts, my dear!"

A shudder of rage passed through her as she heard his words. Oh, how she hated herself that she had been such an imbecile as to drift into a position in which this wretched cad could dare speak to her as he would speak to a millhand in Milwaukee.

Oh, heavens! How dreadful it was, she thought, to loathe and despise a man, and yet to be obliged to use him! It was all her brother's fault, who had placed her in such an odious and agonizing position! It seemed as if the whole of humanity, dead and living, were in conspiracy against her!

"Look here, my dear," said Mr. Massarene in a low tone, as they crossed the Speaker's Court, "I'll send you

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round to your house in an hour a line or two that you'll sign. Mere matter of form, but must be done, or I can't treat with your jeweler. Sign it, put it in a sealed envelope, and send it back by the bearer. When I get it, I'll take the club train at nine o'clock. To-morrow's Sunday. There's nothing odd in going out of town on Sunday."

"Very well," she said faintly; for it had never occurred to her mind that Billy would be business-like with herself. She was used to people who, whether they had little or much, never stooped to *marchander*. Nobody had ever asked her to sign anything before, except Beaumont.

"What do you want a signature for?" she said impatiently. "Can't you forget you sold sausages?"

She was looking at a brougham entering the courtyard, and not at the face of William Massarene; had she seen it, careless as she was, she might have been alarmed.

He did not reply.

As he put her in her carriage, she said, with anxiety:

"You won't tell anybody, will you?"

William Massarene smiled grimly.

"A man who sold sausages don't come to be what I am by telling people what he does. Telling aren't my habit, your Grace. Go straight home and wait for my messenger."

She was not used to remembering that her servants existed, but she was for once nervously conscious that the footman holding open the carriage-door heard these words, and must wonder at them. Oh, what a path of thorns she had entered upon, all because Providence, or the Ormes, or Ronnie, or whatever it was, had made life so difficult for her!

She did go straight home, for she was conscious that she could not afford to miss Massarene's messenger, who arrived punctually within the hour.

She glanced feverishly at what he had sent her; a few lines printed in typewriting, so that his own handwriting did not appear; it seemed to her inoffensive; it authorized him to pay Beaumont the money for her, and get back the Otterbourne jewels; it further stated that when he should have completed the transaction, she would be his debtor

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for the sum of twelve thousand pounds sterling. This last clause she did not like. It alarmed her. For an instant a flash of good sense came across her mind and suggested to her that it would be a thousand times better to send for Ronald, even for any of the Ormes, and confess her position to one of them, than to put herself in the power of this man whom she had cheated, fooled, derided, ridiculed, and ordered about under the whip of her contemptous words. Her relatives would save her from all exposure, at whatever painful cost to themselves. But her vanity and her stubbornness rejected the whispers of common sense. She detested Alberic Orme, and her feeling toward her brother was now little less virulent. "No!" she said to herself, "rather than confess myself and humiliate myself to either of them, I would die like Sarah Bernhardt in *Ixeile!*" But she forgot that there are worse things than death.

After hesitating for ten minutes, and looking down with disgust on this paper, which looked so vulgar with its big type-written words, she decided with a reckless plunge into the unknown to sign it, and scrawled at the bottom of the lines the name which she wrote so seldom, Clare Otterbourne. With similar haste she thrust it into an envelope, sealed and sent it down to Massarene's messenger.

She cried bitterly when it was irrevocably gone from her, but she felt that she could do no less than she had done; everybody took such dreadful advantage of poor Cocky's death!

"I shall treat the beast worse than ever," she thought, as her sobs ceased gradually. "*Poignez vilain il vous oindra.*"

She had always beaten her *vilain*, and he had always submitted and cowed before her. She believed that he would do so as long as he lived.

For this satirical, intelligent, and *fin-de-siècle* creature, so quick to see and ridicule the follies and frailties of other creatures, did not in the very faintest degree understand the stuff of which William Massarene was made.

Meantime, he was travelling toward Dover in the club train with the type-written paper safe in his inner breast-pocket. This errand pleased him.

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CHAPTER XXV.

SHE had never known great anxiety before. She had had many worries, many troublesome moments, when she wanted money, but never such a weight of care as this. There had always been Cocky, on to whose shoulders she had been able to throw the blame of everything; and whose ingenuity had frequently (for a consideration) been of exceeding use to her. Now she was alone, without even the solace of having Harry to quarrel with and upbraid; and she had put herself and her secret and her signature into the hands of William Massarene. When she thought of it she felt as if a rush of ice-cold wind passed over her.

It was Sunday. She went to a fashionable church and took Boo with her, looking a picture of childish loveliness in the crape frock, and her big black hat and her little black silk legs displayed far above the knee.

"Mammy's got a lot o' bills to pay," said Boo at the schoolroom dinner.

"How d' you know?" asked Jack.

"Cos she prayed such a deal," said his sister. "She flopped down on her knees and I think she cried."

"There must be bills then," said Jack seriously. "Or p'rhaps," he added, "'twas only the church. Churches is always sorrowful."

"I don't mind 'em," said Boo. "There's a lot o' fun in people's bonnets. I drawed two or three bonnets in my Prayer Book."

Their mother was, indeed, as Boo's observant eyes had discovered, greatly disturbed and apprehensive. Throughout the service of the fashionable church she was absorbed in one thought: would Billy play her false? Would he, if he were true to her, be in time? Might not Beaumont be away from Paris for the Sunday, like so many Parisian tradesmen; he had a country house, she knew, at

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Compigne. What would happen to her if, when the men from Coutts's came, and she had not the veritable diamonds to give?

Exposure, complete and inevitable, must follow; when the jewels should be brought to valuation Hurstmanceaux and the Ormes must at least know the truth, and that seemed to her worse than to be pilloried, as people were of old, and stoned by the multitude.

She thought she could trust "Billy"; she felt that a hard-headed man of business would not go over to Paris on so grave an errand and leave it undone; but she could not be sure, a thousand things might happen. Channel steamers never do get wrecked, but the one in which he crossed might do so; the train might come to grief; Paris might be in revolution; Paris made revolutions as rapidly as it made omeletts for breakfast; she was not naturally imaginative, but in this tension of terror her fancy conjured up innumerable horrors as she apparently kneeled in prayer.

When she came home she shut herself up in her bedroom, said she had a headache and took a little chloral. As she lay on her sofa, with a handkerchief over her eyes, she heard the children trundling down the staircase to go for their afternoon drive; they always were driven somewhere into the country on Sunday afternoons to avoid the crowds and noise of the parks. She heard Jack's voice shouting a negro melody as he jumped down three stairs at a time. She got up despite her headache and her chloral, opened her door which led on to the stairs, and caught the little sinner as he passed her by his blouse.

"How can you let the duke disgrace himself so?" she said sternly to the governess. "The very boys in the street respect the seventh day."

Then, still with her fair hand closed fast on the blouse she said to the wearer of it: "I am shocked at you, Jack! Go upstairs to your room and stay there. You do not go out to-day."

The great tears brimmed up in Jack's eyes, but he would not cry; he looked at her with a fixed reproachful, indignant look, very like Brancepeth.

The governess and the nurses all pleaded for him;

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everyone in the household loved Jack as they hated Boo. But it was in vain; his mother was in that kind of mood when every woman must have a victim, and he was all that offered to her. He was taken upstairs to be locked in his chamber by a sympathetic under-nurse, who whispered consolation. Boo, half vexed, half pleased, called after him with much self-righteousness: "I telled you never to sing those naughty songs. Didn't I tell you, Jack?"

Jack did not reply or look round; he went manfully onward and upward to his doom. His mother retired to her own repose, whilst Boo, with the two other little boys, descended down to the entrance hall. She was glad to think of Jack shut up in solitude and fretting his heart out this fine clear rainless afternoon in May.

The governess and the head nurse whispered together in the landau as to the duchess's strange unkindness to her eldest son. Boo, who never lost a word of their whispering, when she sat between them, turned up her pretty nose: "Mammy don't like Jack 'cos he's got everything; she's got to give him her jewels."

For Boo, unseen and forgotten, had been sitting in the next room, playing with her big doll which talked, whilst the scene concerning the jewels had taken place between her mother and her uncle. Boo enjoyed anything which bothered Mammy. Only Boo was of opinion that the jewels ought to be her own, not Jack's.

Meantime poor Jack, crying his heart out on his bed, thought, "Whatever good is it being a duke? Two of 'em have had to die one after the other, and I've got to be shut up here. And how mean it was of Boo to crow over me. Boo's so like mammy. I wish there were no women and no girls."

At that moment the sympathetic under-nurse brought him two peaches and a raspberry ice, which she had begged for from the kitchen, and Jack kissed her and thought better of her sex.

"I wish all women were dead 'cept you, Harriet," he said tenderly.

"Oh, your Grace, don't say that," said Harriet. "But it was to be sure cruel unkind of your mamma."

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"I hate mammy," said Jack with a deep drawn breath. "She took away my Punch, and she's sent away Harry."

"Oh, your Grace, don't let yourself blame your mamma," said the good nursemaid. "But for sure it is hard to be shut up here on a bright breezy day. But eat your peaches, dear, 'twill all be the same to-morrow."

"But you're shut up too, Harriet," said Jack, regarding her thoughtfully.

"Law, yes, sir, I never hardly gets an hour out."

"But you'd like to go out?"

"Yes, sir; but them as it above me, you see, don't think of that."

Jack ceased munching his peach and looked at her gravely. "I think that's very wrong. When I'm a man, Harriet, *everybody* shall have hours out."

"You dear little soul," thought Harriet, "you think so now, but when you're a man I dessay you'll be like all the others, and think only of yourself."

"No, Harriet," said Jack, solemnly divining her thoughts, "no, I sha'n't forget."

The solace of having hurt Jack only momentarily diverted his mother from her torturing thoughts for a brief space of time. Her mind returned in fretting and feverish anxiety to the mission on which William Massarene had gone.

Two or three intimate friends were coming to dine with her at eight o'clock. She wrote a few hasty words and put them off on the score of her headache; they were intimate friends, and what is intimacy worth if it does not enable us to sacrifice our intimates to ourselves? The notes sent, she went to sleep and slept fitfully for some hours. She really felt ill, for she was so unused to severe mental disturbance that it affected her physical health. She would have liked to send for her physician, but she was afraid he would perceive that she had something on her mind. She saw in the mirror that she did not look like herself.

She was so unused to being alone, that solitude was in itself an illness to her. She had no resource of any kind; everything bored her except the life she was used to lead. She could never imagine why people read books or wrote

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them. Even the newspapers she had never read, except when they had had something about herself or Cocky.

William Massarene had said, "Mind you are alone," and she felt that it would be the height of imprudence to have any of her friends with her when he should make his appearance at ten o'clock. She took a bowl of hot soup, a little claret, and a little fruit, and felt better. She had herself arrayed in a tea-gown of crape, with loose floating sleeves and a long train which trailed after her; it was very becoming; her hair was loosely wound round her head, and a high jet comb was stuck in it. She went down and into her boudoir. It was eight o'clock. She had forgotten Jack. Lights shaded with big butterfly shades were burning low. The room was full of the scent of lilies of the valley. It was a nest for human nightingales. And she had to wait for an odious brute out of Dakota, who had got her signature for twelve thousand pounds! How disgracefully inappropriate to the boudoir and to herself!

There were several rings at the door-bell which echoed through the hall below; but no one came for her.

She felt it was a blessing that Harry could not come; he had been used to racing up the stairs when he heard she was unwell, and forcing his entry by right of usage. And yet in a way she missed Harry. She had always been able to make him believe anything.

Ten o'clock struck at last. She shivered when she heard it. If the man did not come, what on earth would she do in the morning? She almost resolved to take the jewel-safe and go out of England. Certainly neither Ronald nor the Ormes would pursue her as a common thief. But after a moment's consideration she knew that to do this would be useless. They would find her wherever she went, and her life would be ruined. No, she reflected, there was nothing but to trust to Billy. She had always had immeasurable power over him, and moved him about like a pawn at chess. She did not doubt that she would always be able to do the same. *Ce que femme vent!* was her gospel.

She belonged to a world in which the grace and charm of women are still very dominant features; but William

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Massarene belonged to one in which woman was represented by a round O, except in as far as she was wanted for child-bearing and household work. In her latest transaction with him she had confided in him as if he had been a gentleman; she had ignored what she knew so well, that he was but a low brute varnished by money. She expected him to behave as a gentleman would have done in similar circumstances, forgetting that he had neither blood nor breeding in him.

She watched the movements of the hands of the little timepiece with intense anxiety. The tidal train arrived in Cannon Street at half-past nine. He might have been here by ten. It was twenty minutes past ten when the bell downstairs rang loudly. It was he! A few moments later a manservant ushered him into her presence; she had given orders that they should do so immediately on his arrival.

He was hot from his journey and dusty, and had some of the smoke of funnel and engine upon him; he had never been more unlovely: he had his hat on his head as he entered and his overcoat on his shoulders; he took both off slowly as a man does in whose eyes good clothes are precious, and she watched them with her nerves strung to the highest pitch, yet her intense agitation not excluding a vivid anger at his want of ceremony. His coat carefully laid on a chair, and his gloves on the top of it, he came and sat down before her, square, solid, hard as a piece of old Roman masonry.

"Well?" she said breathlessly. How cruel it was to keep her in such suspense!

"It's all right, my lady," he replied briefly.

She raised herself on her couch, animation and color returning to her face, light to her eyes, warmth to her face.

"Oh, that is very good of you!" she exclaimed. "I am very grateful, indeed I am."

William Massarene laughed a little, deep down in his throat.

"Gratitude don't wash, my dear. I never took a red cent of it in change for any goods of mine."

"But I *am* grateful," she said, disconcerted and vaguely

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distressed. "It was very good of you. What have you done with them? Where are they?"

He took a large packet out of his inner breast-pocket.

"I had the tiara dismounted because 'twas safer to carry it so. You'll know how to put it together, I guess."

With a scream of relief and delight she sprang up and seized the packet, tears of joy welling up into her eyes.

"Verify 'em," said Massarene, and she undid the parcel and saw once more the great dazzling egg diamond and all its lesser luminaries. He watched her as a tom-cat on the tiles with gloating eyes may watch some white graceful feline form walking amongst roses in a garden.

"Verify 'em," he repeated—"count 'em."

"I have, I have," she said in her ecstasy. "They are the Otterbourne diamonds just as I gave them to Beaumont. Oh, my dear good man, how can I thank you?"

He did not answer; he breathed so loudly and heavily that she thought he was going to have a fit, and she could not but wish that he might have one. Like a child with a toy she took the jewels and began fitting them together to make the ornament she had so often worn.

"Oh, how can I ever be seen without them! It is so monstrous, so brutal to shut them up at Coutts's unseen for all those years!"

As soon as she had escaped from one danger she, woman-like, bewailed another affliction.

"How did you get over Beaumont," she asked: "was he disagreeable about me?"

"No; like a man of sense he was glad to get his money and asked no questions whence it came. Here is his receipt."

He held it before her, but he did not let it go out of his hands. She saw that Beaumont had received of William Massarene, on behalf of the Duchess of Otterbourne, the sum of three hundred thousand francs *plus* interest. A painful flush rose over her face as she saw that, and she realized more distinctly what she had done.

"How can I ever repay you?" she murmured.

William Massarene's thin tight-shut lips smiled, not agreeably. He put the receipt back in his breast-pocket.

"And my signature?" she said timidly, the first time in all her life that timidity had ever assailed her.

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Then he smiled outright.

"I ain't Billy the scorned no more, am I, my dear? Where's your cheek, my lady?"

Mouse, bending over the tiara which she was building up, turned sick at his tone. She dared not resent it. She was vaguely but intensely alarmed, and she was aware that this man, so long her butt and jest, was her master.

He sat with his hands still on his knees and with a horrible leer on his dull eyes, gazing at her as a fox might look at a silver pheasant from which nothing divided him. He had always succeeded in everything, and now he had succeeded in getting *quid pro quo* for all he had endured and expended for her.

As far as his sluggish passions could be aroused they were excited for her; she had aroused in him one of those passions of mature years which are more slow yet more brutal than those of youth. But stronger still than this was his grim pleasure in her humiliation, in her silence, in her subserviency.

And what a fool she was, despite all her fine airs, and cool wit, and sovereign disdain!

He continued to gaze at her fixedly, the veins swelling like cords on his forehead, his stertorous breath as loud as the gasp of an engine, his small grey eyes grown red and shining luridly.

"My signature?" she repeated in an unsteady voice.

"You've got the jewels, my beauty. You can't have no more."

"Then it is not generosity!" said Mouse passionately, and very unwarily betraying her unfounded hopes.

"No, my dear," he answered, "I never said 'twas." Then he put his two big knotted yellow hands one on each knee, and looked at her mercilessly. "Think I'll take my payment now, or else the di'monds," he said, with a vile chuckle.

She felt his odious grasp on her bare arms and his loathsome breath on her cheek.

"Don't cry out, my beauty, or you'll lose your di'monds," he said, with his lips on her shell-like ear. "You've got to be fond of Billy now!"

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CHAPTER XXVI.

On the morrow, at the appointed hour, the real Otterbourne jewels were consigned to the representatives of the Otterbourne bankers, and Hurstmanceaux, like all kind-hearted persons, now that he had got his own way, felt sorry he had been obliged to enforce it, especially as he heard that his sister was unwell, and could see no one. "Poor little Sourisette," he thought remorsefully. "Perhaps I am too hard on her. She had a beast of a husband. She is more to be pitied than blamed."

Always ready to forgive, he called in Stanhope Street more than once, but she refused to see him. The children told him she was unwell and invisible.

Boo came flying down the staircase between the palms and pointsettias in all the glee which to be the bearer of an unpleasant message naturally afforded her.

"Mammy says she won't see you ever any more, uncle Ronald," said this miniature woman, with much contemptuous dignity. "She would like, if you please, that you shouldn't speak to her even in the street."

Boo felt very important, standing in the middle of the hall, in her crape frock, with her black silk legs, and her golden cascade of hair on her shoulders, as she delivered herself of this message, and pursed up her lips like two red geranium buds.

"Tell your mother that her desires shall be obeyed," said Hurstmanceaux, and he turned and went out, followed by the saucy echoes of Boo's triumphant laugh.

She never liked her uncle Ronald; she was very pleased to see such a big, tall, grown-up man go away in discomfiture.

"You should have said it kinder, Boo," murmured Jack, from above on the staircase.

"Why?" said Boo, with her chin in the air. "He don't ever give us anything, at least, hardly ever."

"Oh, yes, he does," said Jack, with remonstrance.

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"And *she's* cruel nasty. She's took away the Punch, and sent away Harry." He did not much like his uncle Ronald, but he was sorry for him now that he, too, was dismissed.

Hurstmanceaux was sad at heart as he walked down Great Stanhope Street into the Park; he was full of compunction for having, as he imagined, wronged his sister about the jewels, and he was deeply wounded by the unforgiving ingratitude of her feeling toward himself. He had made many sacrifices to her in the past, and although a generous temper does not count its gifts, he could not but feel that he received poor reward for a devotion to her interests which had impoverished him to a degree he could ill support. The day was bright and breezy, the flowers blazed with color, the season was at its height, everyone and everything around him was gay, but he himself felt that cheerless depression of spirit which is born in us of the ingratitude of those we cherish.

Katherine Massarene passed him, driving herself a pair of roan ponies. She thought how weary and grave he looked, so unlike the man who had laughed and talked with her as they had gone together over the snowy pastures and the frozen ditches of the hunting country more than two years before.

"It's really flying in the face of Providence, Ronnie, not to marry the Massarene heiress," said Daddy Gwyllian, that evening, in the stalls at Covent Garden, letting fall his lorgnon, after a prolonged examination of the Massarene box.

"I never knew that Providence kept a Bureau de Marriage," replied Hurstmanceaux, "and I do not see what right you have to speak of that lady as if she were a filly without a bidder at Tattersall's."

"Without a bidder! Lord, no! She refuses 'em, they say, fifty a week. But you know, Ronnie, you do fetch women uncommonly; look what scores of 'em have been in love with you."

"If they have, I am sure it has benefited them very little, and myself not at all," replied Hurstmanceaux, very ungraciously.

"She keeps a circular printed—a stamped form of re-

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fusal," said Daddy Gwyllian with glee. "Sends 'em out in batches. Have a mind to propose to her myself, just for the fun of getting a circular."

"Your wit is as admirable as your invention is original," said Hurstmanceaux, with much impatience, glancing, despite himself, at the box on the grand tier, where the classic profile and white shoulders of Katherine Massarene were visible beside the large, gorgeous, and much-jeweled person of her mother.

Margaret Massarene disliked the opera-house. What she called the "noise" always reminded her of the braying of bands and the rattling of shots on a day of political excitement in Kerosene City. But she was not displeased to sit in that blaze of light with her di'monds on her ample bosom, and feel that she was as great a lady as any other there; and she was proud and pleased to see the number of high and mighty gentlemen who came to make their bow in her box, and with whom Katherine "talked music" in the most recondite and artistic fashion.

"That's the Duchess's brother down there," she whispered, as she turned her lorgnon on Hurstmanceaux.

"It is," replied Katherine.

"Why don't he come up here like the rest?" she asked. "He's the best looking of them all."

"He has never left his card on you," answered her daughter. "It would be very bad manners indeed if he came here."

"And why hain't he left his card? I'm sure we've done enough for his sister."

"He probably does not feel that any gratitude is obligatory on him. He probably does not approve of her accepting favors from strangers."

"Then he's born a century out of his time," said Mrs. Massarene, with the acuteness which occasionally flashed up in her. "In these days, my dear, everybody takes all they can lay their hands on——"

"Hush!" said Katherine, as Jean de Reszské came on to the stage.

Margaret Massarene would have preferred a companion who would have worn big pearls, and had some color in her gown, and who would have talked all through "the

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music," and would have made a sign with a flower or a fan to that handsome man down there to come up with Daddy Gwyllian and chat with them.

"Why didn't my lord come up with ye?" she asked, as Daddy did appear.

"His lordship's music mad, ma'am," replied Daddy, who delighted in adopting her style; "never misses a season at Bayreuth, or a *première* of Saint-Saëns's."

"He's never left a card, and 'tis rude," said Mrs. Massarene. "We know all his sisters and brothers-in-law."

"It *is* rude, madam," assented Daddy, "but men don't go often where they're liable to meet their own families."

"That's a heathen sentiment," said Mrs. Massarene severely.

"Only human nature," said Daddy cheerfully. "Human nature is much the same, dear lady, whether heathen, Chinee, or Christian."

"Ye don't know much about the Chinese, sir," said Mrs. Massarene. "They're that wrapped up in their families that they're always agoin' to their graves; not like the folks here, who poke a dead person into the earth and give orders to a florist, and then thinks of 'em never no more. The Chinese pray to their dead; 'tis very touching, though it may be an offence to Deity."

"I imagine, ma'am, their sensibilities are not blunted by death duties," said Daddy rather crossly; he disliked being corrected, and he disliked being taken *au pied de la lettre:* it is highly inconvenient to anyone who has the reputation of a humorist.

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CHAPTER XXVII.

BRANCEPETH, like Hurstmanceaux, was sincerely unhappy through her, for a woman whom men love much, despite her faults and caprices, has an almost unlimited power of worrying and of torturing their less complex and more kindly natures. The breaking of a habit is always painful, and he had an affectionate soul. To have the door of Stanhope Street shut in his face hurt him as it hurts a kind-hearted St. Bernard dog to be shut out of an accustomed house and left to pine on the area pavement.

She swept past him in her carriage with a distant bow which cut him to the quick. Pride kept him from calling at her residence, but he could not help haunting the street to see the little black forms and golden heads of the children trotting off on their noonday walk, or Jack, in solitary manhood, riding with his groom.

There was no one to whom he could appeal.

Her sister, Carrie Wisbeach, the only one of her family who had ever liked him, had been three months away on a yachting journey round the world; and he felt, without ever hearing it said, that her people and her set approved the conduct of the Duchess of Otterbourne in having broken with him; they approved her more than if she had married him.

"Mammy's took away my Punch, Harry—the beautiful Punch you giv'd me," said Jack, in woebegone accents; it had been a real Punch, show box, puppets, a Toby that squeaked, and a set of pandean pipes—a delicious toy with which Jack could make believe to be "the man in the street" to his great ecstasy.

"She says I'm a little beast 'cos I have everythin'. What have I got? She's even tooked away the Punch. I haven't got anything," said the poor little man with tragic intensity.

"Taken away the Punch? Oh, lord! That is real mean," said Brancepeth, with his face growing very dark.

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"Merely because I gave it you? What devils women are!"

"I always telled you, Harry," said Jack solemnly. "I always telled you that mammy could be nasty. You've set her back up, that's what you've done."

Jack was sitting astride of an Exmoor pony with his left hand resting on the crupper, and his face turned full on his friend in melancholy reproach. Harry was on the pedestrians' side of the rails and had stopped the rider under a tree in full fresh leaf. This was the only way now in which he could see the children, when they were out walking or riding, and he managed to waylay them. The nursery doors were closed against him, and he felt his exile as bitterly as the cast-out Peri of the poem.

"You should have put up with mammy," said Jack, with the superiority of a sage, "'cos you can't come to us now she's angry with you. And when she's angry once, it lasts a long long while, for ever, and ever, and ever."

His tone was very impressive; he spoke as if he had a hundred years' experience behind him; and his big soft black eyes had tears in them; he missed his Harry.

"You dear little beggar!" said Brancepeth tenderly, but glancing apprehensively at the groom on the off-side. "Don't fidget your pony's mouth, Jack; keep your bridle hand quiet, low down and quiet."

"That's the little Duke," said some work-people walking past, and smiled good-naturedly.

"What a little love!" said some ladies.

"You've got Tom Tit, Jack, and you'd better gallop him," said Brancepeth, nervously conscious of the open ears of the stolid and wooden-faced groom. "Don't let his Grace hustle his pony; there can't be a worse habit," he said to that functionary. "Never hustle your cattle, Jack, do you understand? Off with you, dear! I want to see how you go."

He watched the pretty figure of the boy as Tom Tit skurried over the tan with his undocked tail switching the ground, and his sturdy, shaggy little head pulling wilfully at the bridle.

"Took his Punch away! Good lord! What out-and-

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out brutes women are," he thought, as he leaned over the rail under the green leaves in the sunshine.

But his heart was heavy and his conscience ill at ease, and he envied Hurstmanceaux the power he had over these children and their future.

"Harry's been hard hit over the Oaks," said one of his friends, staring after him, to another as they passed. "Never saw him look so blue in all his days."

"No; he's got to marry Lady Kenny, I suspect," said another of his friends, using the title by which she had been known to the town so long.

"If I go on as I am doing now, what shall I be when that dear little beggar's a man?" he thought. He felt that he would be a very poor example for the child he loved. He felt that Jack, who loved him in return, would get no good from him, but might be led into much evil. "I'll try and pull up," he said to himself. "If I'm alive twenty years hence, I should like those little chaps to be the better not the worse through knowing me."

He sighed as he thought so, and then he laughed at himself for being in such a mood. They were Cocky's sons, of course! Why should he bother about them? His laugh was bitter, but his heart was heavy.

She had used up all the best years of his life, and beggared him to boot, and he had no more power over her than if he had been the crossing-sweeper yonder in St. George's Place.

Harry was not very wise, and the ways of his life had not been prudent, but a seriousness and sadness which he had never known came over him as he watched the Exmoor pony till it was out of sight, and then walked on by himself in the opposite direction toward Apsley House.

The next week he had a long interview with his father, and another with his Colonel, and in a week or two more he sent in his papers.

"I shall never alter the pace here," he said to his father, who, much relieved that he did not hear Harry was going to marry the Duchess of Otterbourne, said, cordially: "No, my dear boy, we can't get out of the swill till we're clear of the stye!" By which elegant metaphor he meant life in London.

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It was growing hot and close in Mayfair and Belgravia, and Jack went for his last ride in the Park one sultry misty morning when the sky was like a grey woolen blanket, and the Serpentine resembled a dull steel mirror as it reflected the forms of the ill-fed and melancholy water-birds.

Tom Tit and Jack were going down on the morrow with the rest of the juvenile household to the country. Their mother was already away from London.

Jack was worrying his mind with wondering how he should see his favorite friend in the country. In other years Harry had generally been where they were, that is to say, when they accompanied their mother to Homburg, or Carlsbad, or Cowes, or Staghurst, or Scotland. But Jack was uncomfortably and dimly conscious that those pleasant days were over and were not likely to be renewed. It is hard at his age to have to look back to the past with regret. But Jack felt that nothing in his present was likely to be so agreeable as those merry days when his mother and Harry had been such good friends.

It was very warm, heavy weather; even Tom Tit had not much scamper in him, and his rider let him amble slowly along whilst he himself pushed his sailor hat to the extreme back of his head and yawned, opening his rosy mouth as wide as it would go.

"Men don't yawn in their saddles, Jack," said a voice, which was music in his ears.

"Oh!" he cried, with delight. He was on the north side of the Park, no one was near, and Brancepeth was walking where he had no business to be, as he was on foot. He came up to the child and greeted him, then turned to the groom:

"I want to speak to the Duke a minute or two. You will wait here," he said, as he slipped a gold piece into the man's hand. "Jump off, Jack, and come with me."

Jack needed no second bidding.

The groom, with the sovereign in his whip hand, made no opposition, and Harry walked away with the boy across the grass, talking to him as they went of horsemanship and all its etiquette, while Jack's face, gay and rosy in its happiness, was turned upward with adoring eyes.

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"I thought I shouldn't see you again, Harry," he said, as he trotted along by his friend's side. "We're all going into the country to-morrow."

"With your mother?" asked Brancepeth.

"No; mammy's at Ems. Boo's so cross 'cos she's got to stay with us. She won't play at anything."

"When did your mother go?"

"Day before yesterday."

Brancepeth sighed.

"And she didn't leave 'ny money, and she didn't leave 'ny orders for us, and the servants went away, and there was nothin' to eat, and the scullery-maid she came upstairs, and said: 'You duckies, I'll buy you chops if I go without a new hat,' and nurse said she was an imperent jade, and we didn't get 'ny chops, and somebody sent to uncle Ronnie, and he came and gived money, and I told him of the scullery-maid, and he gived her half a sovereign, and said, 'You're a good girl,' and that I heard, and we and the dogs and horses go down this afternoon."

Jack drew a long breath after his eloquence, and added, "Harriet is gone down into Essex to see her mother, who's dyin', or *she'd* have bought the chops."

There were very few persons on the north side of the Park, and they went on across the grass until they had got out of sight of the groom, and came up to an elm tree with a circular bench round its roots.

"Let's sit down a moment, Jack," said Harry. "It will be a long time perhaps before I see you again."

"Why?" said Jack, in alarm. "Are you going to Ems?"

"No, dear—I am not going to Ems," said Brancepeth sadly, looking down at the boy's face, with the golden nimbus of its ruffled hair and the black circle of the sailor hat framing the hair as in an ebon frame. There was no one near.

The great elm trunk was behind them like a wall, and its branches above them like a roof.

How far away they seemed, those pleasant summers when, as the London season ended, he and she had planned their meetings at this bath or at the other, and Cocky, pliant, philosophic Cocky, had said always oppor-

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tunely: "You'll come too, won't you, Harry? Filthy feeding and beastly waters, but they set one on one's legs again somehow or other."

The distant sound of the traffic in the road beyond the railing was like the muttering of an angry but distant sea. A white butterfly floated above the heat-scorched turf. Jack's two little sunburnt hands were clasped on one of his own; he looked longingly and wistfully down on the child's face and form as we look on what we cherish and may never see again.

"Jack," said Brancepeth suddenly, "if you were never to see me any more after to-day would you remember me?"

Jack's face had on it the distressed perplexed wonder with which children feel their hearts stirred by appeals which they very dimly understand; his eyes were suffused, his forehead frowned. "Of course I should," he said almost crossly.

"Really?" said Brancepeth very wistfully.

"Yes," said Jack very solemnly; then he burst out crying. "What do you say such things for?" he said between his sobs. "Where's you going?"

"You dear little beggar," said Harry, much moved himself, as he put his arm round the child's shoulders and drew him closer. "I am not sure I'm going anywhere, but I may go a long way, and I mayn't come back. Don't cry. Listen. If you grow up without seeing me try and be a good man. Not such a beast as men are nowadays. Not such a fool as I am; a mere horse-riding, card-playing, dawdling, gaping, well-groomed tomfool. Keep out of the accursed London life. Don't mind what women say. Tell the truth. Keep straight. Live on your land, if any land's left when you're of age. There are a lot of things I want to say to you, but I don't know how to say 'em, and you're too little, you wouldn't understand. But don't do as I've done, that's all; and make yourself as like your uncle Ronnie as you can."

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CHAPTER XXVIII.

KATHERINE MASSARENE noticed that her father paired early in the season and was ordered by his physician to take the waters of Ems. But she made no remark on the fact, and her mother said, quite unsuspiciously, to her husband on his departure, "If you see the Duchess there, William, give her my love. She was looking worried and worn when she left." She was always fascinated by that lovely apparition which had seemed to her so splendid an incarnation of aristocracy and grace, delicious insolence and incomparable sorcery.

"Them German waters are wonderful curers," she said to her daughter. "They're good for the Duchess's nerves, and your father's rheumatics."

Katherine said nothing. Was her mother as simple as she seemed? she wondered. Herself, in her own despite, she felt a curious reluctant pity for Hurstmanceaux's sister; such pity as she might have felt if she had seen a lithe young jaguar crushed by the hirsute strength of a baboon. The jaguar is itself cruel, stealthy, pitiless, but still—the duel is unequal, and is decided by sheer brutal savage force.

"Somehow or other," she thought, "my father has frightened her and cowed her; she looks as racing mares do when they come in off the trotting piste, with their strained eyes and their nervous trembling."

She felt a vague desire to warn the victim of her father's character, of his pitiless cruelty, of his unutterable brutality; but she knew that it would be unfilial to do so, and would be probably an act useless, misunderstood, and attributed to some selfish motive. She knew the world well enough to be aware that, whatever we may do to serve another, we are always suspected of serving our own interests.

To her it was evident that the saucy and thievish rodent had run once too often and once too near the

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claws and teeth of the tom-cat, who had let her gambol before him only to seize her and crunch her at leisure. She came very close toward the truth in her observations and deductions, but she shut her suspicions up in her own breast, and said nothing to anyone, being used to live without confidantes and to put a padlock on her lips.

"Who would ever have thought Sourisette would be so depressed by her little beast of a husband's death?" said the friends who saw her at Ems that summer, one to another. They found her extremely altered; she was nervous, pale, had lost her spirits, and shut herself up a great deal, alleging her mourning.

"Mouse as *la veuve inconsolable* is too droll," said her world; but when it became known that the guardians and executors had taken away the Otterbourne jewels, including the roc's egg, and locked them up, never to be unlocked until Jack should attain his majority, her female friends argued that it was no wonder she felt such an insult.

"It is not an insult. It is the law. The trustees are obliged to do it; the little Duke's a minor," explained their male relatives. But to the female mind this kind of explanation always appears as trivial as it is impertinent. The general impression was given in society that Hurstmanceaux was very harsh to his sister, and that his unkindness was the cause of her loss of spirits and change of habits; moreover, it was said that it was he who had insisted on her rupture with Brancepeth.

Altogether she was pitied and admired, for her conduct had been quite admirable ever since the day that her wreath of forget-me-nots had been placed on poor Cocky's grave, almost side by side with Lily Larking's harp of calla lilies.

No one noticed that when she went on from Ems to Homburg, William Massarene went there also a few days later, whilst his wife and daughter remained at Vale Royal; no one except the courtly diplomatist of the silk dressing-gown, who was at Homburg too, and who observed that she did not bully "Billy" as she had done in the days of the Bird rooms, and that when "Billy" approached her there came into her eyes a flash of hate, a

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gleam of fear and loathing. Also that whatever he proposed in the way of walking, driving, or dining, she acquiesced in with a certain sullenness but with unusual docility.

If ever in his sturdy life William Massarene had been shy, he was so when the gaze of this accomplished person met his own. But whatever the minister observed, and any conclusions he might draw from his observations, he kept to himself, having in his career learned that there is no proverb truer than that of *l'arbre et l'écorce.* He was bland and charming both to *l'ours et l'agneau*, as he called them. *Pauvre agneau!* She had gambolled too carelessly and skipped too nearly the hairy arms of the ponderous bear! The diplomatist felt thankful that he could look calmly as a spectator at the struggle. He was prudent by nature and by habit, and beyond all women who were ever created his own personal reputation and his own personal ambitions were dear to him.

Equally circumspect, Massarene, as he took great care not to compromise himself, did not compromise her, except in the inductions of such very fine and accomplished observers as this diplomatist, of whom there are few left in the hurry and hurly-burly of modern society. If the whole of his constituency had been watching him, he could not have been more careful. A man has not been President of the Band of Purity and the White Ribaud Association in an American township without learning how to keep his neighbors' noses out of his own whiskey and candy stores.

But he was an ever present horror in her life. He could subdue her with a glance of his colorless, dull eyes. She no longer dragged him behind in the dust of her chariot; she was dragged in the dust behind his. She was tortured by the ever harrowing dread that others would notice the change. She had even lost the spirits and the nerve to invent fictions to account for such a change to her friends. She let things drift in apathy and disgust and fear.

From Homburg he let her go on to Carlsbad, where he did not show himself, and thence on a visit to a sister of hers who had married a Magyar magnate, where she was

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for a while in peace, since there certainly her tyrant could not go.

Her children were meantime still at Whiteleaf, a ducal property, of which Alberic Orme held the living, where they and the Blenheims had a healthier, if less brilliant, life than had been their portion when with her. She had no anxiety about them. She knew that their uncle Ronnie would see to all that was necessary for them. She hated his conscientiousness bitterly, but she trusted to it as to a staff which would never break.

The vast domain of Staghurst had already been let to an Indian maharajah. Otterbourne House had been leased to the representative of a great Power. All other houses and estates were similarly disposed of, and the strictest measures were being taken to make the little Duke's minority fruitful.

The dreadful debaucheries of Cocky had impoverished his father woefully, and the entail had been eaten into as the eastern coast of England is being gnawed away by the sea. But the long minority would do much to restore the fallen fortunes of the great dukedom, and a strict economy was inaugurated.

Her own jointure was of course paid regularly to her; but it seemed to her brother that it must be utterly insufficient to afford her means to live as she chose to live. A great disquietude and alarm always weighed on him about her, but she had chosen to quarrel with him. He could not sue for reconciliation when he was in the right.

Hurstmanceaux was as tender-hearted as he was proud, and if she had made any sign of contrition or affection he would have forgiven all her insolence and have gone to her at once. But she had shut the door in his face; she had insulted him by the lips of her little daughter. He could not make any advances to her. For her own part she was relieved not to see him. Something might have transpired to excite his suspicions; he might have noticed the altered tone of William Massarene, or he might have interrogated her as to her ways and means, and found her replies unsatisfactory. He was much better away, and she made no sign to him. Her movements he heard of from his other sisters, and from the columns of the *Morn-*

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ing Post. In the late autumn he saw that she was staying at Vale Royal; the Christmas recess she passed with Carrie Wisbeach; the new year saw her in a suite of rooms at the Residential Hotel facing Hyde Park.

"How does she get the ready money?" he said to Lady Wisbeach, who had come from her journey round the globe as though she had only been down to Greenwich.

"Oh, a woman alone, you know, with only a maid," said that loyal lady carelessly, "a woman alone needn't spend more than a sparrow. It isn't as if she had the children. And then in mourning, and hardly going out except to quiet little things——"

Hurstmanceaux did not find the explanation very satisfactory.

"Do you think she regrets that man?" he said, after a pause.

"What man?"

"Lord Brancepeth."

"Oh, no," said Carrie Wisbeach. "My dear Ronnie, where *do* you live? Who regrets things when they have been on all that while?"

He was silent; he felt that his sisters were far beyond him in the knowledge of life.

"You might as well talk of regretting a worn-out shoe," said Lady Wisbeach, with some impatience.

"Surely you admit she should have married him?"

"I?" cried his sister with amazement. "I implored her not to marry him. She would have been mad if she had married him. She would not marry him when—when she was wild about him. She married Cocky. She did quite right. The Inversays are utterly ruined. The old people have nothing. The very little he ever had came from his grandmother, old Lady Luce, and that little was—was—well, was got rid of in a year or two. Besides, nothing is so stupid—such a want of sense and *savoir faire*—as to marry a person who has been talked about in connection with you. It is foolish. It confirms things. It makes people laugh. Of course if you get a very great position by it, it's a different thing. But even in that case I should always say to a woman—at least to a young woman—don't!"

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"Why especially to a young woman?"

"My dear Ronnie, you are really too stupid for anything! If a woman isn't young she isn't likely to have many offers of marriage, is she?"

"I see," replied Hurstmanceaux, and felt once more that beside the worldly wisdom of his sisters he was indeed a novice.

"You live in the country till you forget everything," said Lady Wisbeach.

During the visits of the Duchess of Otterbourne to Vale Royal her hostess saw a great change in her. "That pretty creature isn't what she was, William," she said to her husband. "She don't cheek you as she used to do, and she seems quite down in the dumps. Surely it can't be that she's fretting on account of the death of that little drunkard?"

William Massarene did not look at his wife as he answered. "'Tis want of dollars frets her, my good woman. That's a disease as ages these young uns fast. Thoroughbred mares want gilded oats."

"Deary me! What's the use of being a duchess if you don't get gilded oats?" said his wife. She was troubled by the idea of anyone so exalted being brought so low as to want money. Being tender-hearted she redoubled her attentions to her guest, but being tactless she mingled with them a familiarity for which their object would willingly have murdered her, and which she resented all the more bitterly because she was forced to conceal her resentment.

He got far beyond all social need of her now. His position was secure in the county, in the country, in the world. Men knew what he was worth both in millions and in mind, and they feared him. He did not scruple to treat them like dirt, as he expressed it, and it was they who wanted him now, they who had to sue for his good offices and bear his snubs.

For some few people like Hurstmanceaux he was still only a cad sitting on a pile of money-bags; but these were so very few that they did not count, and he could very well do without them.

All the pick of the Tory party came to Vale Royal, shot

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his pheasants and partridges, drank his rare wines, asked his opinion, and shook his hand. If out of his hearing they still called him a blackguard American, they were now extremely civil to his face, and when he wanted them he had only to whistle. It pleased his love of dominion and his sense of successful effort. He felt that all these noble people, pretty people, fastidious people, all these political chiefs and swell notabilities and leaders of parliament and of fashion, were as so many comedians, all playing for him. He hated them for a great many reasons: for their polished accents, for their way of bowing, for the ease with which they wore their clothes, for the trick they had of looking well-bred even in shabby gowns or old shooting-coats. But he despised them; he could afford to despise them, and they could not afford to despise him.

When he thought of this he passed his tongue over his lips with a relishing gesture, like a dog who has been eating a beefsteak.

With the world, as with the Duchess of Otterbourne, he had ceased to be suppliant—he had become master; and he had always been a hard master, he had always thought that the best argument was a long strip of cowhide.

"Oh, you brute—you unutterable brute! If a look could kill you, you would fall dead where you stand!" thought Mouse one day as she looked from one of the windows of the Bird room, and saw his short broad figure, with the squat legs cased in the gaiters of a country gentleman and the country gentleman's round felt hat on his stubbly iron-grey hair, as he went over the turf with his back to her, having on his left the lord-lieutenant of the county, and on his right the Tory Chancellor of the Exchequer, each of them bending their tall forms affably and listening to him with deference.

But looks cannot kill; and he continued to walk on across the sunlight and shadow over the grass, and she continued to watch him from the upper windows, convulsed with a deadly loathing impotent rage against him, such as Marie Antoinette must have felt for the gaoler of the Conciergerie.

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There were men who loved her to insanity; even in the weary, shallow, indifferent, modern world there are still women who inspire insane if short-lived passions, and she was of those women; but she could not appeal to any one of these men since appeal would entail confession; and confession to one would mean exposure to all, for she knew that her tyrant would be merciless if she freed herself from him, or he would not keep her signatures as he did keep them. Skilled in male human nature, and the management of it, though she was, she had no experience to guide her in dealing with Massarene, because all the men amongst whom she had lived had been gentlemen; and the way of treating women of the gentlemen and the cad is as different as their way of shooting. A man capable of acting as Massarene did could not have been met with in her world.

"It is all our own fault," she thought. "Why do we let these boors and brutes in at our gates because they have got their sacks of bullion on their backs?" And as she always blamed somebody for the issue of her own errors, she thought with detestation of Cocky coming up to her under the trees at Homburg, and telling her to make the acquaintance of the Massarenes.

Happily for her William Massarene was too cautious, too busy, and too ambitious a man to lose much of his time in torturing her. He delighted in her hatred, her helplessness, her servitude, but she was only a toy to him; his gigantic schemes of self-advancement, and his many financial enterprises, engrossed him much more, and he would not have risked his social position by a scandal for all the beautiful women in creation. He supplied her with the money she wanted, but he made her beg, and he made her sign, for every penny of it. It was fine sport!

Her own people attributed the change in her to her rupture with Brancepeth; and, in himself, Hurstmanceaux did so also. But it was a subject on which he could know nothing since the scene she had with him concerning her late friend, and he could only suppose that like many another woman she sorrowed for the loss of what she had refused to keep. He knew that she stayed a good deal with the folks at Vale Royal, but his penetration did

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not go farther than to conclude that she did so because it saved her expense. He saw nothing of her personally in the autumn and winter following Cocky's death; his unavoidable communications with her on business were made by letter. Sometimes he wondered how she and the lady with whom he had walked to Greater Thorpe got on together; he did not think that they could suit each other; but he saw little of the one and nothing at all of the other.

Of William Massarene he of course saw nothing either; so that the curt and insolent tone which Massarene at times now allowed himself to use to one whose humble slave he had once been was unknown to him; if he had heard it and resented it, the "bull-dozing boss" would have cast the truth in his teeth, and, grinning, have awaited his reception of it, for courage had never been lacking to the man who for thirty years had held his own against the hatred of the whole Central States.

This terror lest he should thus tell the truth to her brother haunted her night and day. She did not think there was much fear because she knew that he held his social position as dear as life itself, and he would be well aware that Hurstmanceaux would destroy it at a blow. Still she could not be sure, for she knew that temper sometimes hurries the wisest and most ambitious man into irrevocable indiscretion.

She had herself lost absolutely all power over the man who had been so blindly her slave. Their positions had wholly changed. It was she who shrank from his glance; it was he who ordered and was obeyed. She, who had no acquaintance with pain, suffered as never before would she have believed it possible to suffer. Humiliation, terror, abhorrence, self-contempt, were all united to an agony of apprehension with regard to the future. She would easily have made a second marriage, but her tyrant forbade her any such issue from her difficulties.

She had never before supposed that it would ever be possible for her to be miserable in London, but she was so now; the dull cold bleak weather aiding her depression, and the mourning which she had still to wear seeming to her indeed the very livery of gloom.

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A whole hothouse of flowers emptied into her room could not make opaque yellow fog supportable, and the sight of William Massarene driving past her windows or coming up the staircase anything less than torture.

How she envied those women of ruder ages who could hire bravoes for a quick cold steel to rid them of what they loathed. She hated him so intensely that there were even times when she looked wistfully in at the gunsmiths' shops in Piccadilly.

But she lived in a world in which all strong passions seemed farcical, and the ridicule of the thing restrained her from buying a revolver. A tragedy with Billy as the slain! She laughed a hollow little laugh of misery and scorn as she threw herself back in her brougham and ceased to look at the little ivory mounted weapons so temptingly displayed by the gunsmiths.

She had insight enough to perceive that his adoration of her was a thing dead and gone for ever; she saw that the only dregs of it which remained with him were love of hurting her, of mortifying her, of ordering her about as though she were a factory wench in one of his cotton-mills in North Dakota. Fortunately for her his prudence saved her from any display of this tyranny in public; but in private he treated her as a tanner of the Ile de France might have treated a young duchess of the Faubourg when it only needed a sign to the mob for the axe to fall and the pikes to be twisted in the perfumed hair. She had no will of her own; she dared not dispose of her time for a week; she had to know what he permitted and what he forbade.

"She's a morsel for a king," he would say to himself, passing his tongue over his lips. Still he had become very indifferent to her, except that his power of humiliating her was always agreeable and stimulating to him.

"You've found out as Billy ain't a fool, haven't you, my beauty," he said a hundred times to her. "Billy's been one too many for you, eh?"

And at such moments if a revolver had been near her she would have shot him dead.

The harassing torment of her compulsory submission to him made her look worn, anxious, thin. "Surely I am

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not losing my beauty," she thought with horror, as she looked at herself in the mirrors, and each day she was obliged to have a little more recourse to the aids of art.

She knew well enough that however brilliant may be artificial loveliness, it is never quite the same as the radiance of that natural beauty which can affront the drenching rain of a hunting-field or the scorching sun on a yacht-deck, or, most difficult to bear of all, the clear light of early day after a ball.

Oh, how she hated everyone! Cocky in his grave, and Beaumont in his shop, and Ronald who had brought all this misery upon her, and Brancepeth who had taken her at her word; and—oh, how bitterly and with what deadly hatred!—this coarse, common, hideous creature who said to her in his brutal derision:

"Billy's been one too many for you, eh, my dear?"

He had put this thoroughbred trotter into the harness of his homely wagon, and it never ceased to please him to watch her jib, and start, and tremble, and pant, as he flogged her along the stony road of subservience to his will and desires.

The more intensely she dreaded and loathed him the more entirely did he enjoy his revenge. It had cost him a great deal of money, but he did not grudge the money. The sport was rare.

"Stow that, my pretty," he said to her when he saw her receiving as if she liked it the attentions of some man who might very well be in earnest and desire to persuade her to a second marriage. "Stow that, my pretty. You aren't a-going to wed with nobody—Billy's here."

Her disgust, her indignation, her helpless revolt, were all infinitely diverting to him; he let her free herself a moment, only to pull her up with a jerk and remind her that he was her master. She felt that as long as he lived he would never let her escape him.

"Perhaps I'll marry you myself if the old woman goes to glory," he said with a grin. "Don't you count on it though, my dear; I may see somebody else and disappoint you!"

His position was too dear to him for any jeopardy of it to be risked for any other consideration on earth. It was

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to his own fear for himself that she owed such partial relief from him as she obtained, such comparative liberty as his jealous vengeance permitted; such formal politeness as he showed her in society. He was afraid she might make a confession to Hurstmanceaux if he pressed her too hard, and this feeling alone kept his tyrannies within certain bounds, and compelled him to treat her with courtesy before the world.

But the low-bred ruffianism which was his true inner man showed itself frequently in private.

Once he wiped his dusty boots on the hem of her gown.

"A duchess's frock makes a nice door-mat," he said with relish. "Don't you squeal, my pretty, or damn me if I don't wipe 'em with your hair next."

She knew that he would do as he said.

He kept her in perpetual slavery also for him in the world; he made her serve his interests with all her relatives and friends; he sometimes exacted what was not only difficult but almost impossible, and she had to get it done somehow or other. His ambitions grew with what they fed on, and he became arrogant, critical, overbearing in his expectations.

"I mean to die a lord and a cabinet minister," he said, with a sense that death could only be his obedient valet like the Conservative party.

"If wishes could kill you, you would fall dead where you stand," she thought; but she dared not say so, and she devoured her hatred and her humiliation in silence.

"You aren't so young as you were, my beauty," he said one day out of doors, staring ruthlessly at her. "Billy don't agree with you, eh? Keep worrying the curb, don't you? Pull as hard as you will, you won't get your head. You're between my shafts, and you must just go quiet over the stones at my pace, my lady fair."

The stones were very sharp, and this road was apparently without an end. She grew thin, she looked harassed and hectic, she contracted a nervous way of glancing back over her shoulder to see if he were within earshot, even when she knew that he was a hundred miles away.

One day when he was with her one of her many ad-

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mirers sent her a large gilded gondola-shaped basket filled with Palestine lilies and La France roses.

"Who sent these?" he growled, and he pulled the card off it and read the name. It was a great name. "What's this mean, eh?" he said as he showed her the card.

"It means nothing at all," she said, with that tremor in her which was partly impotent rage and chiefly genuine fear; and added, with a little nervous laugh, "We have no language of flowers like the Orientals."

"Eh?" said Massarene, who did not understand—"mean nothing, do they? That's one of your damned lies. Now ye hearken to me, my lady. Him as sent 'em 's so deep in my debt that he'd hev to turn crossin' sweeper if I held up my little finger. Now I won't hev my debtors come gallivantin' to my sweetheart. Mind that. Make him keep his distance or it'll be worse for him and for you. You know Billy by this time."

Then he kicked over the gilded gondola and trampled the beautiful flowers under his big feet.

Her nerves gave way under the sickening nausea of the scene. She buried her face in her hands and sobbed aloud, her tortured pride of race and of womanhood writhing like some delicate animal in a steel trap.

William Massarene stood and watched her, his thumbs in the armholes of his coat, his legs wide apart, his yellow teeth showing in a broad grin. It was rare sport. It had cost him an almighty pile of dollars, but it was rare sport. He felt that after his long career of hard work and self-denial he had earned the right to some such fun and feast as this.

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CHAPTER XXIX.

WITH the next season he allowed her to accept the loan of her sister Carrie's house in town; that lady having gone on a little trip to Japan. She hated the Wisbeach house, which was dark, ugly, and situated in the dreary district of Portman Square. Carrie Wisbeach, who was but little in town, and was a sportswoman renowned in more lands than her own, had little heed of all the artistic and graceful luxuries with which her younger sister had always required to be surrounded, and had left her husband's old London house very much as his grandparents had made it.

Mouse detested it unspeakably, but it was roomy and a good way off Harrenden House, and she put up with it, trusting that she would be almost always out of it. For her tyrant favored rather than discourages her perpetual appearance in society; it prevented people talking, and in society alone could she favor his interests social and political.

She was still altered; she had still that harassed apprehensive glance backward over her shoulder; but she was familiarized with her captivity, and had learned to make bricks without straw for her bondmaster without too plainly betraying to others the marks of the sand and the clay in which she was forced to kneel.

Ever since her first season she had done whatever she had pleased, and amused herself in any manner she desired. But she had never got into trouble, never been compromised, never felt her position shake beneath her. A woman, young and popular, who has great connections behind her, can, if she have tact and skill, easily avoid being injured by scandal. If she knows how to conciliate opinion by certain concessions, she can enjoy herself as thoroughly as any young cat gambolling about a dairy; and no one will seriously interfere with her. Society had certainly "talked"; but when a woman has a brother like

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Hurstmanceaux, and a father-in-law like the good Duke of Otterbourne, and many other male relatives high-spirited and innumerable, people do not talk very incautiously or very loudly.

Now through "Billy," for the first time, she saw her position jeopardized. That low-bred creature, whom she had made fetch and carry, and wince and tremble at her whim and pleasure, had now the power to make her, if he chose, in the eyes of the world, that miserable, contemptible, and despicable creature, a *femme tarée*.

Sometimes, too, a more tragic, a more sickening, fear assailed her, when she thought of the possibility of her tyrant telling the truth, in boastfulness or in revenge, to her brother. It was not likely, but it was always possible; for she saw that in William Massarene, at times, temper—the savage, uncontrolled temper of the low-born man—got the better of good sense, of caution, and even of ambition. She could never be sure that it might not do so some day in her case, and that for the ruffianly relish of dragging the pride of the head of the House of Courcy in the dust, he might not throw to the devil all his cherished triumphs, all his hardly-bought distinctions.

Happily for her Hurstmanceaux was almost always in the country, or on the sea, and the sight of him in London streets seldom tempted the fiend to rise in her gaoler.

Meanwhile the London season came on and ran its course with its usual plethora of pleasure and politics, its interludes of Easter and Whitsuntide weeks, and its comings and goings of people, who could not live without running to Rome, flying to Biskra, shipping over to New York, and taking a breathless scamper to Thibet.

Katherine Massarene came up to town in the spring, sorely against her will, and she went through the routine which was so wearisome to her, and rejected many offers of the hands and hearts of gentlemen with whom she had exchanged half-a-dozen sentences at a dinner-party or riding down Rotten Row.

"Lord, child, what do you want that you're so particular?" said her mother, who did not approve this incessant and ruthless dismissal of suitors.

"I want nothing and no one. I want to be let alone,"

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replied her daughter. "As for the life of London, I abhor it, I am asphyxiated in it."

Suitors who might fairly have expected her to appreciate them solicited her suffrage in vain; she did not give them a thought, she abhorred them—everyone. She only longed to get away from it all and have finished for ever with the pomp, the pretention, the oppressive effort which seemed to her parents the very marrow of life.

"Mr. Mallock calls this the best society of Europe," she thought again. "If it be so, why does it all come to us to be fed?"

Had she possessed the disposal of her father's fortune she would not have fed it. Being obliged to stand by and see it fed, in such apparent acquiescence as silence confers, she lost all appetite herself for the banquet of life.

Such slight cutting phrases as she permitted herself to speak were repeated with embittered and exaggerated emphasis in London houses until London society grew horribly afraid of her. But it concealed its fear and wreathed in smiles its resentment, being sincerely desirous of obtaining the hand of the satirist for one of its sons.

More than once the Press announced her betrothal to some great personage, but on the following morning was always forced to retract the statement as a snail draws in its horns. To her mother it seemed heathenish and unnatural that a young woman should not wish to be "settled"; she thought the mischief came from the education Katherine had received, reading books that had even a different alphabet.

"You want all the hideous vulgarity of a fashionable wedding, my dear mother," said Katherine. "If ever I should marry I assure you I shall wear a white cotton gown and go alone to some remote village church."

"My dear, how can you say such things? It is quite shocking to hear you," said the mistress of Harrenden House, infinitely distressed.

"Pray set your mind at ease," said her daughter. "I shall never marry, for the best of all reasons that no man whom I could respect would ever marry me."

"Not respect ye! How can you say such things?

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You're the daughter of one of the richest men in the whole world, and he'll be noble as well, he says, afore he goes to Kingdom Come."

The younger woman lifted her head, like a forest-doe who hears the crack of a carter's whip.

"To belong to the Peerage is not necessarily to belong to the nobility; and you may belong to the nobility without being included in the Peerage. Sir Edward Coke laid down that law. Surely, my dear mother, you cannot for a moment pretend that if my father be given a peerage he will become noble?"

Katherine Massarene knew that she might as well have spoken to the Clodion on the staircase, as said these reasonable things to her mother; but now and then she could not wholly keep back the expression of the scorn of her father's ambitions which moved her—ambitions, in her eyes, so peurile and so poor.

"Who was Edward Coke?" said Mrs. Massarene sullenly.

"The greatest lawyer England has ever seen. The greatest exponent of Common Law."

"Well, then, I think he might have known better than to deny as his sovereign can make a gentleman of anybody if so be she choose," said her mother doggedly.

"You might as well say that the sovereign can cure the king's evil!"

"Well, they say she *can?*"

"Oh, my dear mother! Can you live in the world and keep such superstitions?"

"You've no belief in you!"

"I at least believe enough in true nobility to hold that it is a gift of race and breeding beyond purchase, and uncreatable by any formula."

"If the Queen makes your father a lord, a lord he will be with the best of them."

"She can make him a lord; she cannot make him either noble or gentle. His nobility will be a lie, as his armorial bearings are already."

"That's a cruel thing to say, Kathleen!"

"It is the truth."

"Why do I try to reason with her?" she thought.

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"One might as well try to persuade the stone supporters on the gateway?"

But Margaret Massarene, although she would not allow it, did, in her own mind, think that her man was soaring too high in his aspirations. To look up where he meant to rise to, made her feel giddy and afraid.

"They'll never give it to ye, William," his wife ventured timidly to say one day, by "it" meaning his peerage.

He smiled grimly.

"Why not? 'Cos I ain't a Radical turncoat? 'Cause I ain't a Birmingham sweater? 'Cause I ain't a Hebrew broker? They'll give it me, old woman, or I'll know the reason why. You'll be 'my Lady,' if you live."

He devoutly hoped she would not live; but if she did live, she should be Lady Cottesdale.

He had decided on his title, which he intended to take from a little property that he had purchased in the Midlands, and he had already ordered a dinner-service of gold plate, with a coronet on all its pieces, which was to be a work of art, and would take some years to finish. Before it would be ready for him he would be ready for it, with his baron's crown to put on everything, from the great gates to the foot-baths.

Any man who is very rich can become an English peer if he has kept clear of scandals and dabbled a little in public life. And who was richer than he? Nobody this side the herring-pond. The Conservatives were in office. The Flying Boats of the fair, to which he had once irreverently compared the two political parties, had made their see-sawing journey, and the one was temporarily up and the other temporarily down. The owner of Vale Royal was beginning to make them feel that they would lose him if they did not please him, and that they could not afford to lose him. He had a forty-horse power of making himself dangerous and disagreeable.

"A very dreadful person," said Lord Greatrex always, when in the bosom of his family; but he knew that it was precisely this kind of person who must be conciliated and retained by a Prime Minister on the eve of the twentieth century. A chief of government has only a certain quantity of good things in his gift, and he does not waste

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them on those who, being neglected, will not avenge themselves. William Massarene worried the heads of his party extremely; they were well aware that if he did not get what he wanted from them, he would rat and make terms with the enemy. Governments are accustomed to John Snob, whom nothing will pacify, except to become Lord Vere de Vere; but John Snob is never beloved by them.

William Massarene did not care whether they loved him or hated him. The time had long passed when a "How do?" in the Lobby from one of them could thrill him with pleasure and pride; or a careless nod in the dusk on the Terrace send him to dinner with a joyously-beating heart. He could corner the gentlemen of the Carlton as easily as he had cornered a company in other days in Dakota. You could not buy society as you bought a corporation or a department in the States; the matter required more dressing up and glossing over. Still, the principle of purchase remained the same, and Massarene recuperated himself for what he spent so largely in Belgravia by his commercial successes and financial fame in the City.

In the freemasonry of business he had been at once recognized in the City as a Grand Master. Many a London gold broker, railway contractor, and bank chairman felt himself a mere child, a mere neophyte, when this silent, squat, keen-eyed man from the Northwest came down into the precincts of Mincing Lane and Threadneedle Street.

In the City he knew his power, and made it felt. He united the American rapidity, daring, and instinct in business with the Englishman's coldness, reserve, and prudence. The union was irresistible. He had quaked and crouched before fine ladies; but when he met the directors of the Bank of England he felt like Napoleon at Tilsit.

He was a magnate in the City, whilst he was still a neophyte in the great world. But his ambitions were of another kind than those which the City gratifies. They were social and political. He meant to die a Cabinet Minister and a Peer. He went to Walmer one Easter

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and looked at the portraits of the Wardens. "Guess mine 'll hang there one day," he said to himself.

Everything in his new life was still, in reality, most uncomfortable to him; the very clothes he had to wear were tight and oppressive; he had to drink hocks and clarets, when he longed for gin and beer; he had to eat *salmis* and *relevés* when he hungered for bread and cheese and salted pork; he longed to spit on his own carpets, and dared not; he was in awe of his own servants; he was awkward and ill at ease in his own houses; he quailed before the contemptuous eye of his own secretary; and he could not read the bill of fare of his own dinners; and yet, though he pined to be once more in his shirt-sleeves, with a clay pipe in his mouth and a glass of hot grog at his elbow, he was happy in his misery, for he "had arrived."

Not arrived at the apex as yet; but in full view of it, and within an ace of planting his flag on the summit. And so in all probability he would have done in the opening years of the new century but for one of those small, very small, mistakes, which upset the chariot of successful life as the loose rivet, the weak plank, the uncovered valve destroys the stately steamship, the colossal scaffolding, the rushing and thundering steam-engine.

One day in the autumn of the year the American Consul-General in London received a letter from his "great country" which, although ill-spelt, ill-writ, and signed by a poor workingman, startled his secretary so considerably by its contents that he brought the epistle direct to his chief for instructions.

This letter ran thus:—

"'*Onored 'Xcellence, theer's a-living in London town a man as is callt Willum Massarene; 'e was known in this 'ere township as Blasted Blizzard. B. B. made a big pile an' went 'ome, and they says as 'e's a swell an' kings an' lords mess wi' him. That's neither 'ere nor theer. But theer's a pore fellar arsts me to writ this, 'cos he hev hisself no larnin', an' 'e hev workt many a year on Massarene's line—Kerosene, Issoura, and Chicago Main Trunk—an' he's a platelayer an' hev allus bin 'onest an' 'ard-workin', an' 'ad*

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his left arm cut hoff two summers ago by a goods-train, and hev arskt for 'Elp an' got no 'Elp 'cos 'e be a non-Union man, and the Line say as how 'twas 'is own fault 'cos 'e 'ad gone to sleep on the metals. Now this 'ere man, sir—name as is Robert Airley, native o' Haddington, N.B.—says as 'ow he 'ud be a rich un now but 'e med a mistek: 'e sold a claim to a bit 'o ground as 'ad tin in it to this 'ere Massarene when he was young an' starving an' 'is wife in pains o' labor. Robert Airley 'e say he found some sparkles sticking to roots o' grass, an' didn't know wot 'twas, an' show it to Massarene, who was thin kippen a drink and play saloon in Kerosene, and Massarene bought his claim to the land for thirty dollars and ever arterwards dared Robert to prove it, and prove he couldn't, but says as how 'tis God Amighty's truth as he owned the tin and sold 'is rights un-be-known as I tell ye. Bein' allus very pore he couldn't git away from Kerosene, and went on Main Trunk as plate-layer, an' now he arsks yer 'Onor to see Blasted Blizzard and tell 'im as 'ow 'e can work no more and 'e must be purvided for. I writt this for 'im 'cos Robert can't writt 'isself an' I be your 'Onor's 'umble servant,

GEORGE MATHERS,
Lamp-cleaner on K.I.C. Line.
Written in engine-house.

Native o' Sudbury, Suffolk, England, and out in this damned country sore agen his will. Direct Robert Airley, Post Office, Kerosene City, North Dakota, U. S. A.

The Consul-General read this letter twice through very carefully, for its spelling and its blots made it difficult of comprehension. It did not astonish him, for he knew a good deal about the antecedents of the owner of Harrenden House and Vale Royal. He had never alluded to them in English society, because if American consuls once began to tell what they know, society in Europe would be decimated at once.

The letter did not astonish him but it made him very uncomfortable. He was a person of amiable disposition and he felt that it would be unkind to wholly neglect so pitiful and just an appeal. Yet to address the owner of

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Harrenden House and Vale Royal, on such a subject was an extremely unpleasant task, one which he was not disposed for a moment to accept. To tell Solomon in all his glory that he had kept a drink and play saloon, and cheated about a placer-claim, demanded a degree of audacity which is not required by governments from those excellent public servants who sit in consular offices and in chancelleries to indite reports which are to be pigeonholed unread, and throw oil on the troubled waters of international commerce.

He had no doubt whatever that the statements of the letter were true; he remembered having heard it said by some members of Congress in Washington a score of years before that the Penamunic Tin Mine had been obtained by Massarene through a chance more fortunate than honest, and nothing which any one could have told him of the past of Blasted Blizzard would have ever found him incredulous. He knew too well on what foundations the fortunes of such men are built.

"This is very dreadful," he said to the Vice-Consul, when the latter had read the letter. "But you see the man is a native of Haddington. I cannot admit that he should apply to us. We are clearly only here to assist American subjects. If it were a matter of a kind on which I could approach Mr. Massarene as *amicus curiæ*, I would do so. But on such a matter as this it would be impossible to speak to him without offence. Will you be so good as to write to the man Mathers, and tell him that our office is not the channel through which his friend—er—what is his name?—Robert Airley, can apply; tell him he should address the English Consul General in New York."

"Poor devils!" said the Vice-Consul, who knew well what is meant by the dreary and interminable labyrinth of official assistance and interference.

"You know Massarene very well," he ventured to add. "Couldn't you suggest to him——"

"Certainly not," said his chief decidedly. "Massarene is an English subject. So is Robert Airley. So is George Mathers. We have nothing to do with any of them. They have never been naturalized. The application is

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entirely irregular. Return the letter and tell them to address the English Consul-General at New York."

The Vice-Consul did so; and in due time a similar letter was sent to the English Consul-General at New York by George Mathers, who added to it that the wife of Robert Airley had died a week earlier of pneumonia brought on by want of food.

The English Consul-General returned the letter addressed to him, and informed the writer that he could not interfere between employer and employed, or in any private quarrel at any time; the matter was not within his competence.

Then the Suffolk man, who worked in the engine-house and cleaned railway lamps, wrote direct to William Massarene, London. This address was of course sufficient. The letter found its way in due course to Harrenden House and arrived there a week after the opening of Parliament, amongst many coroneted envelopes, appeals for subscriptions, and political pamphlets. It was candid, simple, ingenuous, but it was certainly not politic, and was extremely impolite. It began abruptly:—

"*William Massarene, Sir—Blasted Blizzard, as we used to call yer—you'll remember Robert Airley, though they say you figger as a swell now in Lonnon town. We've wrote to Consuls and They won't do nought, so I write this for Robert to you. You bought Robert's claim; you knew 'twas tin, yet ye niver giv 'im nought but thetty dollars. Robert has workd on yer Line twenty year if One, an' 'e can work no More. 'Is wife she ded last Month, 'cos she were out o' food, an' 'is Son be ded too—rin over on yer Line. Ye're Bound to give 'im enuff to kip 'is life in him. Not to speak o' the placer-claim as ye took and found yer mine in it. Robert's a ole servant on the Line, an' ye be bound to kip life in 'im. Ye was allus close-fisted an' main 'ard, and a Blackgud in all ways, but they ses as 'ow ye be a swell now, an' it won't Become ye to let a ole servant starve as was allus God-fearin' an' law-abidin', an' 'ave workt as 'ard as a 'oss, an' never brott the tin claim agen ye, tho' ye cheated so bad.*"

The letter was signed as that to the Consul had been, and Massarene read it from the first line to the last.

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He had two secretaries at this time, young men of good family and university education, of whom he stood in perpetual awe; but he never allowed these youths to see his correspondence until it had been examined by himself. He received too many letters menacing and injurious, containing too many references to his past existence, for the bland and supercilious young gentlemen to be trusted with their perusal. Therefore the letter from the two railway men in North Dakota came direct into his own hands as he sat in his library before a table covered with papers and blue books, and surrounded by well-filled book-shelves off which he never removed a volume. When he had read it his face was terrible to behold. One of his footmen coming in to look at the fire was frightened at its black savage terrible scowl. It is hard for any man to find his past always rising up like Banquo's ghost against him; to William Massarene it was insupportable.

He had a long memory; he never forgot a face or a name. He remembered all about Robert Airley the moment his eyes fell on the letter. It was thirty years before that the Lowland Scotch emigrant, who had none of the proverbial canniness of his race, but was a simple and trustful lad of some twenty-four years old, had come into Kerosene City, one of a wagon-full of weary folks; there were no railways then within a thousand miles. But he did not trust only to memory. He had brought with him to England all his old ledgers, account books, folios of every kind filling many cases, and all now filed, docketed, and arranged in locked cases in a small study of which he kept the key on his watch-chain. He went to this little room now, and, with the precise and orderly recollection for which his brain was conspicuous, went straight to the books which referred to the tenth year of his residence in Dakota. It took him some forty minutes to find the entry which he required, but he did find it.

"Paid Robert Airley the sum of one dollar for specimens of tin ore." "Paid Robert Airley the sum of thirty dollars for his claim at Penamunic." The transaction was perfectly legitimate and legal. Appended were the receipts of the said Airley and the deed which transferred the land. Twenty-nine years had gone by and the ink

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had rusted and the paper grown yellow, but the record was there.

The fool had sold his bit of prairie land out and out and the tin under the soil of it. He had done it with his eyes open. Who could complain of free contract?

To Robert Airley it had seemed a poor bit of soil, good for naught in husbandry, and his young wife had been ailing and her first delivery at hand; and he had been glad to get the dollars to buy her what she wanted. Many men were in the settlement who could have told him not to sell his placer-claim for a mess of pottage, but there was no one who cared to go against Blasted Blizzard, and, in new townships where shooting irons are arguments, men mind their own business.

William Massarene locked up the ledger and the case containing it, and went back to his library. He then sat down and wrote a cypher telegram to his manager in Kerosene City: "Tell platelayer Airley he won't get a red cent from me. Accident was due to his own carelessness."

He wrote this because he was in a towering rage at the manner in which he had been addressed. Perhaps at some other moment, or if addressed more humbly, he might have bought off these men as he had previously bought off others; but this letter had come to him in an hour when he was filled with vainglory and self-satisfaction. Only the previous day he had been at a banquet given him by the Conservatives of the county he represented. His blood was still warm, his vanity still fermenting like yeast, at the memory of the compliments paid to him by the great personages present; the praises of his glorious self-made position, the homage offered to him in the name of Great Britain. The Leader of the House had given him to understand that when there was next any vacancy or change he would be offered a place in the administration; the great county folks at the county banquet had heaped adulation upon him, for they wanted him to make a new short-route railway line to London; the *Times* newspaper had had a leader consecrated to himself and to his admirable promise as a future chief in the political world. And in such a moment of

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supreme distinction a platelayer and a lamp-cleaner dared to write to him that he had been always a "blackgud"!

Acute as his mind was, and vast as had been the sums which he had expended in shipping his own and his wife's people to Australia, so as not to be annoyed by their demands or vicinity, he should have been willing to spend the insignificant sum which would have pensioned and quieted Robert Airley; he should also have given something to the Suffolk lamp-cleaner and thanked him; both men would have praised him in the city where his fortune had been first made. But the wrath which was in him for once clouded his keen perception; he would not have given either of the poor devils a crust of bread to save their life or his own.

The survival of the strongest was the law of nature; he had heard a sociologist say so. Even beasts in the woods followed that rule; the bison and the opossum and the jaguar and the bear deferred to that law. How should men defy or dare to demur to it?

Because a weak sawney of a long-limbed emigrant had not owned brains enough to see what was under the soil which had been given him, could he blame a keener and stronger man, already on the soil, for having had the wit to know what ore was hidden under the rank grass and the juniper scrub? Clearly, no. Fortune favored those who helped themselves.

"A blackgud in all ways"!

Did a wretched railway hand dare to write this to a colossus of finance whose brain was shrewder and whose pile was bigger than those of any man on the Corporation of London? William Massarene felt as a Burmese Buddha, hung with gold and jewels, may be supposed to feel when a Cook's tourist pokes at him with the brass ferule of an umbrella.

On a man of breeding the insults of inferiors fall without power to wound; but to a man of low origin and enormous pretension they are the most intolerable of offences. For one brief moment all his greatness seemed to him as ashes in his mouth if these workingmen out in North Dakota did not bow down before his glory. It was delightful to be called "my dear friend" by the proud

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Premier of England; it was delightful to be complimented on his stables and his dinners by royal princes; it was delightful to be consulted as a financial authority by the Governor of the Bank of England; but all these delights seemed nothing at all if a platelayer and a lamp-cleaner could refuse to acknowledge his godhead. He knew if he drove through Kerosene City next month the whole population of it would turn out in his honor; the governor of the State, the mayor of the town, the sheriff of the county, the members it sent to Congress, its senators, its solicitors, its merchants, its manufacturers, its hotel-keepers, its white men and its black men, would all be in the streets to cheer and welcome him, to feast and flatter him, to hang out the Union Jack and the star-spangled banner side by side in the oily, sooty, reeking air from the ten-storied houses and the towering factories. But in the background there would be two grimy railway hands who would shout "Blackgud!"

This passing weakness was brief; he was not a man of sentiment. The two railway hands might scream what libellous rubbish they liked. Nobody would listen to them. Curses many, loud and deep, had followed him throughout his career; but they were a chorus which attested the success of that career. What he heard now were the cheers of the House of Commons.

His sense of humiliation was momentary; his sense of his fury was lasting. He would have strangled the two men with his own hands if they had been in sight.

Many bones must whiten in the building of a pyramid, and William Massarene had but done what the Pharaohs did. Only their structure was of brick, and his of bullion.

The letter had only moved him to a momentary sense of fear; it passed almost as soon as roused; but his bitter wrath remained, a fire unquenchable.

Temper is always a bad adviser. It advised him badly now. A very small annuity would have quieted Robert Airley, who knew that he had no legal claim, and had not long to live, for he had a tumor in his stomach. But when the manager of the Main Trunk Line gave the reply of its owner to the platelayer, he, who was a gentle and

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patient man, worn-out with hard work and sorrow, felt a devil enter into him and seize his very soul.

He said nothing, but the manager thought, "The boss might have given the poor fellow a few dollars a week. After all, the Penamunic ore was found on his claim, and he's been on this line ever since the metals were laid."

But the manager cared too well to keep his own post, and knew William Massarene too well to venture to express this opinion.

"My dear child, something has riled your father dreadful," said Mrs. Massarene after luncheon that day; "he's got his black cap on; oh, I always calls it his black cap when he looks thunder and lightning like, as he do to-day, and swallers his food without a word."

"Perhaps the Prince is not coming on the tenth," said her daughter, with that inflection of contempt which she knew was unfilial, and which they told her was disloyal.

Mrs. Massarene shook her head.

"The Prince always comes *here*. He don't get better dinners nowhere; and he's a deal o' use for your father in many ways. 'Tisn't that. I am afeared 'tis some of the folks out in Dakota as bothers him."

"He must have so many who hate him!" said Katherine.

"Well, yes, my dear, no doubt," said his wife mournfully. "Did you ever see a hogshead o' molasses without wasps? He have a very big fortune, has your father."

Katherine was silent.

"Do you know, if he were to die, what he would do with it?" she said after awhile.

"Why, leave it to you, my dear. Who else should have it?"

"I hope he would not. I am sure he would not. I have displeased and opposed him too often. I think he will bequeath it in such a manner that it shall be a perpetual monument to himself."

"He'll leave it to you, my dear. Nature is nature, even in a man like your father."

Katherine shuddered.

"If I thought there was any fear of that I would speak to him about it."

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"Oh, good gracious me, child, don't dream of such a thing!" said Mrs. Massarene, in trepidation. "Twould be firing dynamite! In the first place, you'd never turn him—nobody ever could—his mind's made up, you may be sure, and nothing you could say would change it; but, oh Lord! if you was to hint to him that he must die one day, he'd never forgive it; he's one o' them as thinks he can square Almighty God. 'Twouldn't be decent either, you know. 'Twould look as if you was counting on his going and wishing for his pile."

"If you think it would look like that I will say nothing. But I should beg him to leave me out of his will altogether."

"He wouldn't believe you meant it," said her mother. "He wouldn't believe anybody could mean it. He would think you was trying to find out how much he's worth and how much you'll get."

Katherine Massarene sighed and abandoned the argument. She went to ride in the Park with a heavy and anxious spirit. The season was odious to her; all which to most women of her age would have been delightful was, to her, tedious and oppressive beyond description. The sense that she was always being pointed out as William Massarene's daughter destroyed such pleasure as she might have taken in the music, the art, the intellectual and political life of London. The sense that she was continually on show shut up her lips and gave her that slighting contempt and coldness of manner which repelled both men and women. The many offers for her hand which were made were addressed to her father; no one was bold enough to address them to herself. Everybody, except a few aged people, thought her a most disagreeable young woman.

"Refuse every offer made to you—I do not mean to marry," she had said once to him; and he had replied:

"You will marry when I order you to do so."

But there was something in her regard which restrained him from ordering her, though he received various proposals which tempted him. What he wished for, however, was an English duke if a royal one was not to be had, and there was no duke in the market, they were all married or

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minors. So for the present he left her in peace concerning her settlement in life.

Her heart was heavy as she rode over the tan, her thoroughbred mare dancing airily beneath her. She was a fine rider and quite fearless; but she hated park-riding amongst a mob of other people with a staring crowd at the rails. "A circus would be better," she thought. She passed Hurstmanceaux, who was riding a young Irish horse; he lifted his hat slightly with a very cold expression on his face.

Jack was with him, promoted to a Welsh pony of fourteen hands, Tom Tit having passed to the use of his brother Gerald. Jack and Boo had been sent for by their mother, who had again the loan of the Wisbeach house, her sister being this year in Nebraska for shooting.

Jack was feeling quite a man, his pretty long curls had been cut off, he had a tutor chosen by Lord Augustus, he had a hunting-watch in his pocket, and he was wondering when he should be allowed to smoke. Manhood was not all roses. He never heard anything of Harry, and he did not see much of Boo.

Jack looked after Katherine Massarene and her beautiful mare.

"That's the daughter of the old fat man who gives mammy such a lot of money," he said, as he rode onward.

"What do you mean?" said Hurstmanceaux, startled and stern.

Jack was frightened.

"What do you mean?" repeated his uncle.

"Old man is made of money," he said evasively; his uncle, very high above him, very erect and severe, looking down with sternly searching eyes, was an object of fear to Jack.

"But why do you say your mother has his money? You must have some reason. Answer," said Ronald, in a tone which did not admit of refusal.

"The—the—person who told me knew. But I can't tell you who it was," said Jack, with a resolute look on his face.

The "person" had been Boo. Hurstmanceaux placed a great effort on himself to desist from further enquiry.

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"You are right not to betray your friends," he said. "But you would do better still not to repeat their falsehoods."

Jack did not reply, but from the expression on his face it was plain that he did not think he had repeated falsehoods.

Ronald was about to say something to him about his obligation to protect his mother from such calumnies, but it was not the time or place for lectures on duty; and he was painfully conscious that, the older Jack grew, the less esteem would he entertain for his mother and the more true would such statements be likely to seem to him. What the child had said was like a thorn in his own flesh. He had thought better of his sister since her surrender of the Otterbourne jewels, and he had tried to persuade himself that all her previous faults and follies had been due to the wrongdoing of her husband. The boy's unfortunate speech was like a bolt in a clear sky. For it was certain that Jack could not have had such an idea himself without suggestion from others, and though it was probably the mere garbage of the servants' hall, it was nevertheless miserably certain that some such story must be in circulation.

He continued his ride in great anxiety.

He knew nothing of the affair with Beaumont, but many other things rose to his memory; the sale of Vale Royal, the sale of Blair Airon, her incessant patronage of the Massarenes, the persuasion used by her to induce great and royal persons to go to their houses—all this recurred to him in damning confirmation of the suspicions raised by Jack's words. He felt that he must not question the child further; he could not in honor put her little son in the witness-box against her; but the charge contained in Jack's words seemed so horrible to him that as he rode past Harrenden House he was tempted to stop and enter, and take the owner of it by the throat, and force the truth out of him.

He remembered how much money she had spent that he had never been able to account for; how large her expenditure had been, despite the slenderness of her jointure since the death of Cocky; how obstinately Roxhall had

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always refused to tell him anything whatever about the conditions of the sale of Vale Royal, alleging that it was a thing he was ashamed of and of which he would never speak; and Roxhall he knew had always been in love with her, and turned by her at her will round her little finger.

Something of this kind he had long ago suspected and feared, but the truth had never been visible to him in its naked venality before this morning ride with Jack. So long as Cocky had been alive, although it had been disgraceful enough, it had not seemed so utterly abominable as it did now to know that his sister obtained her luxuries by such expedients. What to do he could not tell. She did not acknowledge his authority in any way, and set the law at defiance as far as she could, even as concerned his jurisdiction over her children. He could not accuse her without proof, and he had none; accusation also was useless—she was wholly indifferent to his opinion and censure. Her position in the world remained intact, and it was not her brother's place to proclaim her unworthy to occupy it. That which he longed to do—to take William Massarene by the throat and shake the truth out of him—was impossible by reason of his own habits, manners, and social sphere, in which all such brawling was considered only fit for cads.

"How very angry he looks!" thought Jack, and was glad when he had got away and changed his riding-clothes, and run upstairs to Boo. It was not very often now that he was allowed to scamper up to the children's tea and daub himself with honey and marmalade, and pile sugar on hot buttered toast. The servants called him "sir," and Boo's governess called him "M. le Duc." It was all deadly dull, and Jack envied the hall-boy.

"You will have a great stake in the country," said his tutor.

"A beefsteak?" said saucy Jack, and was set to write out a line fifty times, which was very hard work to a little man who could only move a pen with extreme slowness and stiffness in letters an inch high, for his education had been extremely neglected.

He admired his uncle Ronald because Hurstmanceaux

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was the kind of man whom boys always do admire; but he was afraid of him, and he sighed for his beloved Harry. There was nobody like Harry in all the wide world, and where had his idol gone?

"Not ever to write!" said Jack to himself, with tears in his eyes. He did not say anything about his anxiety even to Boo, for Boo was at no time sympathetic, and was at this moment delirious with town joys, having gone to a morning performance, some *tableaux vivants*, and a water-color exhibition all in one day, wearing a marvelous picture-hat and a new bracelet-watch.

Except by Jack, Brancepeth was wholly forgotten, consigned to that oblivion which society spreads like a pall over even the memories of the absent. His father and mother heard from him at intervals; no one else. He was one of the many who have gone too fast, who pull up perforce, and drop off the course: such non-stayers interest no one. The men with whom he had gone out to the South Pole, and later to the Cape, returned, and said they had left him there. That was all. He had spoken of exploration. They supposed that meant he had gone "on the make." He had been a very popular man, but popularity is a flame which must be kept alight by the fuel of contact and of conversation: absence extinguishes it instantly.

Jack thought about a great many things, especially when he was shut up for his sins all alone, an event which occurred frequently.

The sum of his thoughts were not favorable to his mother.

"Mother has driven Harry away," he said to himself.

Why?

Perhaps because Harry had come to an end of his money? Perhaps Harry had finished it all buying that Punch which his mother had taken from him?

"If I was sure of that, and if I knew where he was, I'd walk all the world over till I found him," thought Jack; and wondered how he could make out where Harry was gone. No one ever even spoke of Harry. Who could he ask? He asked his groom one morning when he had halted under a tree very early in the Park.

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"I have no idea, sir, where Lord Brancepeth is," said the groom, who was a miracle of discretion.

"Couldn't you ask?" said Jack.

"I don't think I could, sir."

"Wherever he is, he's got Cuckoopint."

"Has he indeed, sir?"

"Yes; because he promised. He always keeps a promise."

"That's a very good quality, sir."

"He's all good," said Jack solemnly.

The discreet groom smothered a smile.

"I'll give you five shillings, Philips, if you can find him and Cuckoopint," said Jack, pulling two half-crowns out of his knickerbockers.

"Make it ten, sir, and I'll do it," said the virtuous groom.

"I'll make it ten," said Jack. "But it must be next week, for I've spent all they give me except this."

"Next week will do, sir," said the groom, slipping the half-crowns in his waistcoat pocket.

Jack did not speak of this transaction to anyone, not even to Boo. He loved his sister, but he had discovered of late years that Boo, to "get in with mammy" and get taken to a garden party or a pastoral play or a picture exhibition, would not hesitate to betray him and his confidences.

"I wouldn't ever betray *you*," he said once in reproach.

"Then you'd be a silly not to, if you'd get anything by it," said Boo, with her little chin in the air and her big eyes shut up into two slits, which was her manner of expressing extreme derision.

"You're so dishon'able 'cause you're a girl," said Jack, with more sorrow than anger.

Every day for a week Jack asked Philips breathlessly, "Well?" but Philips prudently would not admit any knowledge until the next week arrived, when Jack entered into his month's allowance and produced the third and fourth half-crowns.

"If you please, your Grace," then said this prudent person, "the cob as is called Cuckoopint is down at Market Harborough, in Lord Brancepeth's box there."

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"He did buy him, then?"

"Yessir."

"And he—Harry?"

"His lordship, sir, went to the South Pole the summer before last with Lord Tenby and Sir Francis Yorke and two other gentlemen; his lordship have left the Service altogether, sir."

"Left the Guards!"

Jack was dumbfounded. He had always been so pleased to see Harry riding down Portland Place or Kensington Road with all those beautiful horses and cuirasses and jackboots.

"Where's the South Pole?" he asked piteously. Of the North Pole he had heard.

"I don't know, sir," said Philips, much bored; he had had enough of a subject which only brought him in four half-crowns.

Jack had to wait till his ride was over and he could go in the house and get down his atlas and look for the South Pole; he did not make the position out to his satisfaction in the atlas and he turned to the terrestrial globe; then indeed he realized how many weary leagues divided him from his friend. He leaned on the great globe and put his head down on it and cried bitterly. Oh, how he hated his mother! It was his mother who had sent Harry away!

"'Cause he'd done all his money!" he thought indignantly. But how good it was of Harry with no money to keep his word and buy Cuckoopint!

His tutor came in and found him crying; poor Jack had the penalty of position—he was never left alone.

The tutor asked in a rather dry tone what was the matter. Jack, ashamed of his grief, brushed the hot tears from his eyelashes and tried to check his sobs.

"It is quite a personal matter," he said with much dignity as he steadied his sobs. "It doesn't concern anybody but me. Please don't ask."

The tutor, though a severe man, had some tact and judgment; he did not ask, but took a volume from one of the shelves and went out of the room.

To his mother it was convenient and agreeable that

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Brancepeth was out of London. She was not sensitive, but still it had been disagreeable to her to see him there when she had broken with him. Ruptures have always this unpleasantness, that people notice them.

But he was away at the other end of the world, where they all went when they were in trouble, and where they were as good as dead—somewhere distant and barbarous—and in being so he showed more tact than usual, for with that loveliest and most useful of all qualities he had not been gifted. When she thought of his parting words to her she wished a lion or a bison to make an end of him.

She had been fond of him certainly a good many years, but in women of her disposition a wound to self-esteem is the death of affection. Their love is rooted in their vanity, and you cannot offend the latter without killing that which springs from it. At times she wished that he were there that she could make him murder William Massarene; but then murder was unknown in her world, and she could not have told him what made her wish the brute stuck in the throat like a Pyrennean boar; and so things were best as they were.

Poor Harry; if he had remained in England, he would only have been an additional complication. He would have seen, as this horrible brute saw, that shame and disgust and terror were ageing her fast and painfully.

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CHAPTER XXX.

One afternoon there landed from an American liner, at a Liverpool wharf, a tall, bony, haggard-looking man, roughly and shabbily dressed, with a long, tangled, grey beard, and dark, wide-open, wistful eyes; he had lost his left arm. He had been a steerage passenger of the poorest class, and had been moody and silent on the voyage, giving no offence, but making no friends or acquaintances, and saying nothing of whence he came or of whither he was bound; others talked of the little village they were going to return to, of the old parents who were longing to welcome them, of the graves left behind them or the health and youth lost for ever, of their cheated hopes and broken fortunes or their modest gains and longed-for rest; but he said nothing whatever; he had interested no one as he had offended no one; no one noticed or cared where he went when he landed.

He did not stop to eat or drink, but took his third-class ticket for London, and when that was paid had only two dollars remaining in his pocket as his share of the goods of this earth.

He was wedged up between rough navvies in an overfilled compartment, and had a slow, tedious, uncomfortable journey in the parliamentary train. But he did not heed these minor troubles; his mind was engrossed in one overwhelming, all-engrossing thought which sat on his breast and gnawed at his vitals like a vampire.

"I guess I'll find him soon, even in that great city, if he's as big a man as they say," he muttered to himself as he got out of the train and passed into the mirk and noise and hurry of the London streets.

He looked at his little bit of money, hesitated, walked through several streets, then entered a modest eating-house, which proclaimed its calling by eggs and cheese and rounds of beef ticketed with their prices in the window.

He ordered a cup of coffee and a fried rasher of bacon,

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and when he had drunken and eaten these paid his small reckoning and said to the person who had served him:

"Can you tell me where a rich man called William Massarene, who came over from the States some years ago, lives in this city of yours?"

"No, I can't," said the woman. "There's no rich folks in these here parts. But next door at the wine shop they've got a 'Directory'; I'll go and get it for you."

In a few minutes she returned with the huge red volume under her arm and laid it open on the table.

"What trade's your Ameriky man?" she asked.

Airley smiled grimly.

"A gentleman. Money makes gentlefolks."

"Here you are, then," she said, turning over the leaves to the West-end division of the book. "You can look out the name yourself."

"No, I can't," he answered. "I can't read."

"Lord, man, you are behind the time o' day!" said the woman. "Well, tell me the name agen and I'll look it out for you."

He repeated it slowly three times over:

"Massarene—Massarene—William Massarene."

She whirled the leaves about for a few minutes, and then she said triumphantly:

"Here you are!

"*William Massarene, M. P.; Harrenden House, Gloucester Gate; Carlton Club; Vale Royal, South Woldshire Cottesdale Grange, Salop; Blair Airon, Caithness, N. B.*

"That's your friend, isn't it? My, he must be a swell!"

"Which of all them places is in this city?" asked the man.

"Why, Carlton Club and Gloucester Gate, of course, you gaby!"

"Where's Gloucester Gate?" said Airley heavily, without resenting her epithet.

She told him how to get to it. He bade her good-day, murmured a hoarse and tardy "thank ye," and went out of her doorway.

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The woman looked after him with some misgiving in her mind.

"I wish I hadn't give him the address," she thought; "he looks like an anarchist, he do."

She was tempted for the moment to go and tell the policeman at the corner to keep an eye on this stranger, but there were no serious grounds for doing so, and the police were not beloved by those who work for their living in great cities.

So Robert Airley went on his way unnoticed, one of the many ill-fed, ill-clad, gaunt, and weary-looking men who may be counted by tens of thousands in the London streets, and who sometimes are ill-bred and disrespectful enough to die on their pavements. He was not an anarchist, but had been always a strictly law-abiding and long-suffering man, and was by nature very patient and tender-hearted. But a direful purpose had entered into him now, and worked havoc in his gentle breast, and changed his very nature. He walked on through the maze of many streets which divided the humble eating-house from the precincts of Hyde Park. It was four in the afternoon, and the traffic was great and the carriages were countless. But he scarcely noticed them except to get out of their way, and he went on steadily down Piccadilly with its close-packed throngs, and onward past Apsley House and the French Embassy, until he approached what a cabman standing on the curbstone told him were Gloucester Gate and Harrenden House. When he saw its magnificent frontage, its gilded gates, its stately portals, he looked up at them all, and a bitter fleeting smile crossed his face for an instant.

Blasted Blizzard dwelt there!

He rang in his ignorance at the grand gateway's bell. A magnificent functionary bade him begone without even deigning to ask why he had come. He realized that those gilded gates did not open to the like of him. He did not insist or intreat; he shrank away like a starved dog which is refused admittance and dreads a kick, and went into the opposite Park and mingled with the pedestrians, feeling giddy for a moment as the great stream of horses and

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carriages and persons swept past him in the pale London sunset light.

He was a poor, unnoticeable, humble figure, with his battered hat pulled down to shade his eyes and his red bundle under his one arm. Every now and then he put his hand in his breast-pocket to make sure that something which he carried there was safe.

He went onward till he found a secluded part of the Park where he could smoke his pipe in peace, and as he smoked could meditate how best to do that which he had come across the Atlantic to accomplish: wild justice, of which the fascination held him fast in its hypnotism.

He took his pipe out of his pocket and lighted it, where he sat on a bench under a tree. His tobacco was strong and vulgar in its smell. A young lady, probably a governess, who sat on the same bench with two well-dressed small children, put her handkerchief to her nostrils and looked appealingly at a constable who stood near. The policeman touched him on the shoulder.

"We can't have that stench 'ere, my good man. Leddies don't like it!"

"Aren't this a public park?" said Airley.

"Don't cheek me, or I'll run you in as if you was a dawg," said the guardian of law and order.

Airley put out his pipe. His mind was filled with one memory, one intention, one desire; these left no room in it for resentment at petty annoyances. He got up and moved away amongst the well-dressed sauntering people. "Thanks," said the pretty governess who sat beside the children, with a smile to the constable.

Robert Airley walked along slowly with his felt hat drawn down over his eyes. The policeman looked after him suspiciously.

"One of the unemployed?" said the governess, with another smile.

"Calls himself so, mum, I dessay," replied the policeman with impatient contempt. "Them wagabonds ought to be took up like dawgs," he added; he had just beaten a little terrier to death with his truncheon.

Robert Airley's mind was filled with one memory—that of the day on which he had first showed William

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Massarene the shining bits of "sparkles" at the roots of the long grass. "It's silver, ain't it?" he had said to the keeper of that house of entertainment where Margaret Massarene fried sausages for the rough men who drank her husband's strong waters and hot brews.

William Massarene had looked at the shining particles on the grass-roots and had known immediately what it was. "'Tis a rubbishy slate there is in these parts," he said, with great presence of mind. "Where that slate's found ground's always poor and no good for man or beasts."

Robert Airley had believed him; he was a young man of good faith and weak brain.

In the winter which followed on that conversation all things went ill with him: his cow died, his two pigs strayed into the scrub and were never recovered, his young wife was pregnant and ill; the violent blasts of those parts unroofed his shingle house and terrified her almost out of her wits. He took her down into the township of Kerosene and timidly asked Massarene to lend him a little money on his ground.

"I won't lend on it," said Massarene. "I told you 'tis all shale and slate. I'll buy it for thirty dollars. Not a cent more nor less. The slate's the only good thing on it, and that must be quarried, and you haven't means to quarry."

Robert Airley knew that this was the truth as regarded his fortunes, he had not a cent in his pocket; he had nothing to get food or lodging; his young wife in her first labor pains was moaning that she would never go back to that wilderness. He was so tormented and worried and out of heart that he closed with Massarene's offer and sold his claim to the bit of land out and out, and settled in the township as a mechanic, which he had been at home.

Three years later he heard that mining had been begun on his old claim and that a fine vein of tin had been found.

"You cheated me," he said to William Massarene.

"Not I," said the fortunate speculator. "I bought your waste land on spec.; I've a right to what I find

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there. And," he added, with his blackest scowl, stepping close to Airley's ear, "if you dare say a word o' that sort ever again in all your years, I'll put two bullets in your numskull of a noddle sure as my name's Massarene. I aren't a good un to rouse."

Robert Airley was not a coward, but he was miserably poor, and poverty is apt to be cowardice when it is not desperation.

He held his tongue while the ore of the Penamunic mine was being brought to the surface. He loved his young wife, who was miserable away from the friendly faces and merry little shops of her native town, and he adored the rosy-cheeked, bright-eyed, noisy boy to whom she had given birth; life was sweet to him despite his poverty; he did not dare provoke William Massarene, who was already lord of Kerosene township and of much else besides. It was bitter to him to think that had he only possessed enough wit to know what that shining dust on the grass-roots had meant he would have been a rich and fortunate man. But he could not retrieve his foolish unhappy error; and when William Massarene made the Main Trunk Line from Kerosene by way of Issouri to Chicago, over four thousand miles of swamp and scrub, he meekly accepted the place of platelayer on the new railway which was offered him at the great man's instigation.

"You see I don't forget old friends," said Massarene with a cynical grin.

But for his wife and his little boy at home dependent on himself for their bread, Robert Airley would have killed him then and there.

From that day he had never been able to get away from that vile city of Kerosene, which spread and spread in its brick and mortar hideousness between him and the country, which multiplied its churches and its counting-houses, which had its gambling hells next door to its Methodist chapels, which was black and stinking and smoke-befouled, and filled all day and all night with the oaths of men and the cries of beasts, the throbbing of engines, the shrieking of steam, the bleating of sheep, the screaming of women, the lowing of tortured oxen, the

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howling of kidnapped dogs—that thrice-accursed cancer on the once fair breast of the dear earth!

What he would have given that he had never pulled up that grass with those shining atoms in the earth at its roots, but had lived, ever so hardly, on his own ground, at Penamunic, under the rough winds and the torrid suns and the driving snows, toiling like the oxen, hungering like the swine, chased by forest fires, pursued by rolling floods, but free at least in the untainted air, and away from that infernal curse which men dare to call civilization.

Absorbed in his own thoughts, he walked on now along the footpath which runs parallel with the Ladies' Mile; jostling the smart people he passed, who drew away from his contact as though he had been a leper. He was wondering if he could trust his nerve, and rely on his hand, to do what he had come to do.

William Massarene was at that moment in the lobby of the House of Commons conversing with the Conservative Whip.

He was beginning to be appreciated by the Unionist, and he had always been feared. Of course they still ridiculed him to themselves for his accent, his ambitions, his antecedents, and his snobbism, but they knew that he was valuable to them, and he had a hard sound grip of certain practical questions which made members, and ministers too, listen when he was on his legs. In public life of any kind he showed always a certain rude power in him which enabled him to hold his own with the men who surrounded him, whoever they might be.

He was grievous and terrible to the patricians of the Party, but the patricians have learned in the last twenty years that they must pocket their pride to keep their heads above water; politically and socially, Tory democracy has to lie down with strange bed-fellows.

They knew, too, very well that he would exact his full price, that they would have to give him office in some small way at some future time, that they would have to put him on the next batch of new baronets, and that eventually he would have to be hoisted into the Lords in company with the brewers and iron-masters, and wool-

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staplers and chemists, who now adorn the Upper Chamber.

They knew that if they did not please him to the fullest measure of his demands, he would rat without scruple; and there are so many questions in this immediate day about which it is so easy for a man to have a sudden awakening of conscience if he is not obtaining all he wants in the shape he wishes. They knew that, and they hated the thought of it, but they could not afford to alienate and offend him. He had not only money, he had a sledge-hammer power in him, and in a marvellously short time had got his grasp on the attention of the House. He was a common man, a vulgar man, an uneducated man; but he was a man of great ability and absolute unscrupulousness such as no government or opposition can afford in these days to despise.

All the ambitions which he had brought with him from the Northwest were certain of fruition if he lived.

Of death he had no fear; his physician told him that his heart was sound, his lungs were sound, and that he had no tendency to gout or any other malady.

At eight o'clock as he drove home to dinner he felt very content with himself as he rested his short squab figure and massive shoulders against the soft cushions of his brougham. The Whip had consulted him, the Premier had complimented him; the great person who headed a committee of which he was a member had thanked him for his industry and assistance. On the whole, he was on excellent terms with himself. He had done what he had come home to do. He had made himself a power in the land. Even with that merciless rodent who had eaten so far into his fortune he was even now; he was her master now. She was horribly, cruelly, unspeakably afraid of him. He kept her nose to the grindstone, in his own phraseology, mercilessly and with brutal relish. He paid her off for every one of her insults, for every one of her jests, for every one of the moments in which she had called him Billy. He had no feeling for her left except delight in her humiliation, he gloried in her shrinking hatred of him, in her abject fear. If she wanted to marry again—ah!—he chuckled in his grimmest mirth when he

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thought of the pull-up he would give to this throughbred mare if she tried to cut any capers. She should die in a garret abroad, and whistle for her fine friends and her lovers in vain!

Yes, all went well with him. Everybody was afraid of him all round. It was the triumph which he had always craved. They might hate him as much as they liked provided only they feared him, and let him go step by step, step by step, over their silly heads up his golden ladder.

"I said I'd do it and I've done it," he said to himself, with his hands clasped on his broad belly and his long tight lips puffed out with a smile of content.

The carriage stopped at that moment before the open gates; he seldom drove through the gates when alone, for he felt some unacknowledged fear of his carriage-horses when driven by such butter-fingered fools as he considered English coachmen to be, and he preferred to alight in the street. The white brilliancy of the electric lamps of the courtyard was streaming out into the dusky misty night.

He got out of the brougham slowly, for he was a heavy man, his figure plainly visible in the bright light from the open portals, his footman obsequiously aiding him, and the wide open entrance of the great house glowing with light in front of him. A dark figure unperceived came out of the shadow and drew close to him; there was a flash, a report, and the joys and ambitions of William Massarene were ended for ever and aye.

He fell forward on the marble steps of his great mansion, stone dead, with a bullet through his heart.

"'Tis too good for him, the brute! Too short and too sweet!" thought Robert Airley as he turned away, unseen by anyone, and mingled with the traffic behind the dead man's house.

The vengeance he had taken seemed to him a poor thing after all.

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CHAPTER XXXI.

KATHERINE MASSARENE was coming down the staircase under the smiling gaze of Clodion's falconer, dressed for the evening and about to dine out, when she heard the shot, muffled as it was by the sounds of the traffic; in another moment she heard a great outcry and understood that something unusual must have taken place; she descended the stairs more quickly, and was crossing the hall when the inner and outer doors were thrown open, and the servants within hurried up to her.

"Don't go, madam! Don't look!"

"What has happened?" she said to them. "An accident? To whom? Tell me at once."

"Mr. Massarene's murdered, madam," said a young footman, who had hated his employer and relished the telling of the tale. "Don't look, madam; they're bringing him in."

She put them aside and went to the open doors. There she met the body of her father, which was carried across the threshold by four men, his arms hanging down, his head leaning toward one shoulder; behind, in the bright electric light, were curious lookers-on, thrust back by constables. And above, on the head of the staircase, the falconer of Clodion looked down and smiled at the vanity of human ambitions.

Throughout fashionable London people were dressing for dinner, or were sitting at dinner-tables, or were driving to dinner-parties, when the strange rumor ran through the streets and spread from mouth to mouth, and was whispered in ghostly speed through the telephonic tubes of club-houses, that William Massarene had been shot as he had alighted from his carriage at the gate of Harrenden House.

"There *is* a God above us!" said Lord Greatrex to his nephew.

To him it was an immense relief; it was as though an octopus had loosed its tentacles.

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But as the news ran through the town, and was received at first with incredulity and then with consternation, a keen anxiety succeeded to astonishment in the breasts of many—so many of these great people owed him money!

He was assassinated at eight of the clock. By ten in the evening newspapers were issued with the startling intelligence printed in large type. The journals sold by millions; people snatched them from each other's hands and read them in the streets, in the cabs and carriages, under the noses of the horses, in the lobby and on the terrace of St. Stephen's.

He had what answers in modern cities to the Triumph of the Romans. The town talked solely of his end.

That evening the Duchess of Otterbourne was dining *en intime* with a familiar friend at a house in Cadogan Square. They were all congenial and pleasant acquaintances at the little banquet, and after it they sat down to play poker, a game which makes up in excitement what it lacks in intellectuality.

Cadogan Square is somewhat distant from those central haunts where news first circulates, and the poker-players were uninterrupted by the intelligence of the tragedy which was being discussed all around the Parliament House and in the great clubs of the West. They neither heard it by telephone, or by the shouting of newsboys, and when at midnight a young nephew of the hostess, who was also a member of the Conservative party, came into the drawing-room he saw at a glance that the tidings he had brought with him had not been forestalled.

"Oh, I say!" he cried, as he came up behind his aunt's chair. "Oh, I say! Such a piece of news! Who do you think has been shot?"

The players went on with their game unheeding.

"Don't bother, Dick!" said the lady of the house. "Who cares who's shot?"

"Somebody in Ireland, of course," said another lady, with impatience, "Somebody at the Castle?"

"Oh, but I say, Duchess," said the young man, staring at her from behind his aunt's chair, which was opposite to hers, "it's your friend, you know. The fellow that bought Roxhall's place. The member for South Woldshire, that

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you are so fond of. He's been shot dead as he got out of his brougham. It was telephoned to the House as we were all coming away for dinner."

Mouse was standing up to draw a card; she dropped down on her chair as if she too had been shot; her knees shook under her, she gasped for breath. The shock was one of joy, not of grief; but it was so violent that it seemed to take her very life away in the immense relief.

"Dear me, I'm sorry," murmured the young man, greatly surprised. "Had no idea you cottoned to the cad so much."

All eyes were turned on her.

"Shot? When? Where? Who shot him?" she said, in quick short gasps of broken speech.

No one had ever seen her strongly moved before.

"Who, nobody knows. But he was shot dead as a door-nail at his own gate this evening."

"How deeply she must be in debt to him!" thought her hostess, while she laughed and scolded her nephew for coming to disturb them with such eerie tales.

Mouse recovered herself in a few moments, and as soon as she could steady her voice asked again, as the others were asking, "Who told you? Are you sure?"

The young man answered, rather sulkily, that he was quite sure; everybody was talking of it in the House; it was attributed to the anarchists.

"They are good for something, then," said the hostess.

"Don't," said Mouse, conscious that she must account for the emotion she had shown. "Please don't, Pussie. He was a rough, common, ridiculous man, but he was very kind in his way, really kind, to poor Cocky and to me."

"Oh, my dear, what a liar you are!" thought her friend.

"Are you sure he is dead?" Mouse asked of the young member again. "He might be only wounded, and not dead, you know."

"Dead as a door-nail," answered the youthful legislator, resenting the doubt thrown on his news. "He was shot through the heart from behind. He died before they could carry him into the house."

Mouse drew a deep sigh of contentment which sounded like one of regret.

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"Who did it?"

"They don't know. Nobody saw how it was done."

"He must have had numbers of enemies."

"Oh, no doubt."

"Who will have all his money?" asked the lady of the house.

"His daughter, of course," said her nephew. "It will be a lucky dog who marries her."

"Try and be that dog," said the lady. "And now don't you think we've chanted Mr. Massarene's requiem long enough? He wasn't an attractive person. Let us play again."

But her guests did not accept her invitation; they were all more or less excited by the news. Who could tell what scandals might not come to the surface when the dead man's papers were unsealed? Meantime they made as much scandal as they could themselves—raking up old stories, computing how much this, that, or the other owed him, whose debts of honor he had paid, and what personages, crowned and uncrowned, were in his hands.

"What tremendous sport his daughter will have," said one of the ladies. "If I were she I should bring all the bigwigs into court for principal and interest. But she doesn't look as if she liked fun."

Mouse was on thorns as she listened. For the first time in her life people seemed to her odiously heartless. This event mattered so enormously to her that she wondered the earth did not stand still. For the first time in her life she felt the chill of that indifference in others which is at times so hard to bear. Her hostess, who was one of the many pretty women who kissed and caressed her, and hated her, watched her with suspicious amusement. "I never saw Sourisette so upset in her life," she thought. "Did the man pay her an annuity of twenty thousand a year which dies with him?"

It appeared to her that nothing less than some great pecuniary loss could possibly thus affect the nerves of her friend.

Mouse went away from the card-party early.

"One would think the dead cad had held a lot of her 'bad paper,'" said the lady with a cruel little laugh, as

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she returned from embracing her guest affectionately on the head of the staircase.

"I dare say he did," answered her nephew. "I wonder what he'll cut up for? Twelve million sterling, they say, not counting the house and the estates."

"Oh, I don't believe that," said his aunt. "However rich he might be when he came over, Mouse has had the running of him, you know, ever since!"

The friend of whom she spoke thus kindly, as she drove the distance which separated Cadogan Square from Portman Square, heard the shouting of the newspaper vendors: "Murder of Mr. Massarene! Assassination of the Member for South Woldshire! Awful crime by anarchists at Gloucester Gate! Member of Parliament shot dead! Millionaire murdered on his own doorstep! Murder! Murder! Murder!"

There was still immense excitement in the streets. The papers were being sold as fast as they could be supplied. Men of all classes stopped under street lamps or before the blaze of shop windows to read the news. William Massarene had the apotheosis which he would have desired. All London was in agitation at the news of his death. There could scarcely have been more interest displayed if a German army had landed at Southsea or a French flotilla bombarded Dover. The crime was a sensational one; the mystery enshrouding it added to its tragedy; and the victim had that power over the modern mind which only capitalists now hold.

The horror which was in the atmosphere was in herself, and yet what an ecstasy of relief came with it!

When she reached her sister's house she hurried up the stairs and shut herself in her bedchamber, dismissing her maid for the moment. She walked up and down the room in breathless excitation. She longed, oh! how she longed, to see the brute lying dead! How she would have liked to take a knife and cut and slash the lifeless body, and box the deaf ears, and strike the soundless mouth. She understood how people in revolution had sated their hatred in the mutilation and the outrage of dead men and women. She would have liked to tear his corpse limb from limb and fling his flesh to starving hounds.

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Who was the assassin? How she would have rewarded him had it been in her power for that straight, sure, deadly shot! She would have had him fed from gold and silver, and clad in purple and fine linen for all the rest of his days. She would have kissed the barrel of the revolver that had done the deed, she would have cradled the weapon between her white breasts, like a sucking child!

No one, she thought, had ever hated another human being as she had hated William Massarene.

And who could tell whether she was wholly freed from him by his death?

Was it such entire release as she had thought?

She shuddered as she remembered that he had never given her back her own receipt about Beaumont, or Beaumont's to him. He had kept them no doubt locked in his iron safe as witnesses against her. There, of course, his lawyers or executors would find them, and they would pass into his daughter's possession with all other documents eventually.

There was, possibly, the hope that he might have provided for their transmission to herself, but she did not think so; it would not be in keeping with his brutality and his greed to have provided for her safety after his decease. If he had not left those signatures to herself they would be inevitably discovered by his men of business, and be made public as a part of monies due to him. All the unutterable torment which she had sold herself to the Minotaur to escape would again be her portion. She would be at Katherine Massarene's mercy!

For she had no doubt that his daughter would inherit the whole of his wealth, and with his wealth his hold over his debtors. She knew little or nothing of business, but she knew that she, like all the princes and lords who had been his debtors, would see her financial relations with him exposed to the light of day; unless he had had mercy enough in him to provide for her safety, which was not probable.

She passed the hours miserably, though having summoned her women she had taken her bath and had tried to sleep.

She could get no rest even from chloral. When some

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semi-unconsciousness came over her she saw in her dreams the ghost of Massarene with a smile upon his face. "Here I am again!" his shade said, like a clown in a pantomime. "Here I am again, my pretty one!"—and he laid his icy grip on her and grinned at her with fleshless skeleton jaws.

Early in the morning she was awakened from a late and heavy slumber by the cries of the newspaper boys passing down the street and shouting, as their precursors had done on the previous evening: "Murder of a Member of Parliament! Assassination by an Anarchist! Awful crime at the gates of Harrenden House!"

Then it was true, and not a nightmare, which the day could dissipate!

She felt torn in two between relief and apprehension; with her breakfast they brought her the morning papers, which announced the ghastly event in large capital letters. There were no details given because there were none to give; the papers said that there was great activity at Scotland Yard, but at present nothing had transpired to account for the crime.

Later in the day she drove to Harrenden House and left two cards for the widow and the daughter.

On that for Margaret Massarene she had written:

"My whole heart is with you. So shocked and grieved for the loss of my good friend."

"That's very sweet of her!" said Mrs. Massarene with tremulous lips and red eyelids.

Katherine Massarene took the cards and tore them in two.

"Why do you do that, Kathleen?" said her mother between her sobs. "Your poor dear father was always so good to her. 'Tis only pretty of her to sorrow for him."

Katherine did not reply.

The man who killed him was not discovered. No one had noticed the lean bent dark figure which had mingled with the crowd behind Harrenden House.

"But, oh! for certain sure 'twas one of the many as he wronged," said his wife, with the tears running down her pale cheeks. "I allus thought, though I didn't dare to say so, that this was how your father would end some day,

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my dear. He always thought as he was God Almighty, did your poor father, my dear, and he never gave a back glance, as 't were, to the tens and hundreds and thousands as he'd ruined."

Katherine Massarene, very calm, very grave, listened and did not dissent. "What he might have done!" she murmured. "Oh, what he might have done!—how much good, how much kindness!—what blessings might have gone with him to his grave!"

She had felt a great shock, a great horror, at the fate of her father, but she could not feel sorrow, such as the affections feel at death. It was unspeakably terrible that he should have died like this, without a moment of preparation, without a single word or glance to reconcile him with the humanity which he had outraged, but this was all that she could feel. Between her and her father there had always been in life an impassable gulf; death could not bridge that gulf.

"Am I made of stone?" she said to herself in remorse; but it was of no use; she felt horror, but sorrow she could not feel. She was too sincere to pretend it to herself or others. She seemed to her mother, to the household, to the official persons who came in contact with her, unnaturally chill and silent; they thought it the coldness of indifference.

The grief of Margaret Massarene was violent and genuine, but its safety-valve was in its hysterical garrulity. She suffered extremely, for she had loved her husband despite his brutality, and had honored him despite all his faults. She had always believed in him with a pathetic devotion which no ill-treatment changed.

"He was a great man, was William," she said again and again between her convulsive sobs, as she sat by the bed on which his body had been laid after the autopsy. "He was a great man, and God knows what heights he wouldn't have riz to if he'd lived a few years longer. For he'd took the measure of 'em all. He said he'd die a peer, and he would have died a peer if this cruel bullet hadn't cut him down like a bison on the plains. Lord, to think of all he had gone through by flood and by fire, in storm and in quarrel, by the hand of God and by the hand of man; and

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when he comes here to enjoy his own and get his just reward, he is struck just like any poor Texan steer pithed in the slaughter place! The ways o' the Almighty are past finding out indeed."

Then she took his dead hand between both her own and held it tenderly and kissed it.

His princes and his lords, his fine ladies and fair favorites, were all far away from him now; he was all her own in his dead loneliness; her own man as he had been when they had walked across the green fields of Kilrathy on their marriage-day, with all their worldly goods put up in a bundle hung upon a stick. In her grief and her despair there was a thrill of jealous joy; he was once again all her own as he had been on that soft wet midsummer morning when they had walked through the grass man and wife.

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CHAPTER XXXII.

"WE'LL give him the grandest buryin' that money can get," she said to her daughter.

Katherine could not oppose her wishes, alien as they were to her own tastes and desires. She felt that the wish would have been also her father's. The tragic suddenness of his end had startled and impressed London society; the evidences of sympathy and condolence were innumerable and seemed sincere; very many were extremely grieved that the hospitalities of Harrenden House had ceased in the height of the season; and the more personal and secret anxieties in those who were his debtors found natural expression in delicate attentions which took much of the sting of her bereavement out of his wife's heart. A very great personage even called himself, and pressed her hand, and murmured his regret.

"You can't say as your father ain't honored in his end," she said reproachfully to her daughter.

Katherine was silent. Everything that passed was sickeningly, odiously, intolerably offensive to her. The week which followed on his death, during which he was, as it were, lying in state, seemed to her as though it were ten years in length. When it came to a close, the body in its bier (a triple coffin of lead and oak and silver) was taken by rail from London into the southern portion of the county which he had represented, and solemnly deposited at the station of that rural capital town where he had once written down the sum of his subscriptions to the church and to "the dogs." A very imposing gathering of county notables and borough dignitaries, of noblemen and gentlemen and municipal councilmen and clerical luminaries, were all assembled at the station ready to do him the last honors in their power, and sincerely affected by his loss, for the sad and general conviction was that, without his patronage as a fulcrum, the short-route railway would never now be made.

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The blinds were drawn down in the houses of his supporters, and the bells of the churches tolled mournfully as the dismal procession wended on its way through the old-fashioned streets. There were eight black horses harnessed to the hearse with black plumes at their ears and long black velvet housings, and equerries in black walking at their heads, and carriages innumerable followed in slow and stately measure the leading equipages of the Sheriff, the Lord-Lieutenant, and the Mayor, who was a Viscount.

"A prince couldn't be buried more beautiful," murmured his widow, as she followed in a mourning-carriage with four black horses. She derived a strange consolation from this pageantry; it made her feel as if she were doing all she could for his soul, and as if she were keeping her marriage vows righteously. She was pleased, too, to see the drawn blinds, the closed shops, the steady, silent, respectful country crowds, the flag which hung half-mast high on the keep of the ancient town-castle.

"They could scarce do more if 't was a royal prince. 'Tis consoling to see such respect and such lamentation," she murmured, looking out furtively from the handkerchief in which her face appeared buried. The part of her character which had taken pleasure in the great folk and the great houses, and the great successes of their English life, thrilled with pride to think that her "man," her own man, with whom she had toiled and moiled so many, many years, was being honored in his obsequies thus. Even English Royalty was represented at the funeral by a small slim young gentleman with an eyeglass, who belonged to the Household and brought with him an enormous wreath of gardenia and Bermuda lilies.

Her daughter, whose eyes were dry, and who had no handkerchief even in her hand, did not answer, but she thought: "The respect and the lamentation are bought like the crape and the horses' plumes, like the lies on the silver coffin-plate and the stolen place in the Roxhall crypt!"

"That darter o' Massarene's a hard woman," said a cooper of the town to a wheelwright. "Not a drop o' water in her eye for her pore murdered dad."

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"One don't pipe one's eye when one comes into a fortun'," said the wheelwright, winking his own. "And such a fortun'! For my part I respect her; she don't pretend nought."

"No, she don't pretend. But one likes to see a little 'uman feelin'," said the more tender-hearted cooper, watching the tails of the black horses sweep the stones of the High Street. That was the general public sentiment in Woldshire against Katherine Massarene. She was a hard young woman. The county foresaw that she would draw her purse-strings very tight, and be but of little use to it. "A hard young woman," they all thought, as they saw her straight delicate profile, like a fine ivory intaglio, through the glass of her equipage.

It was a fine day in early summer and the sun shone on the green cornfields, the sheep in the meadows, the cows under the pollards, the whirling sails of windmills, the tall yellow flags in the ditches, the hamlets dotting the level lands, the village children climbing on stiles to see the pageant pass.

Katherine looked out at the simple landscape and the soft dim blue of the sky, and felt sick at heart.

"Am I a monster," she thought, "that I can feel no common ordinary sorrow, no common natural regret even, nothing but a burning humiliation?"

The solemn and stately procession went on its way decorously and tediously, along the country roads which separated the county town from the park of Vale Royal. Everybody in the carriages which one by one followed the widow's were excruciatingly bored; but they all wore long faces, and conversed under their breath of the Goodwood meeting, of the prospect of the hay harvest, of quarter sessions, of pigeon matches, of drainage, of ensilage, and of the promise of the young broods in the coverts.

"I think death is made more of a nuisance than it need be really," said the slender young gentleman who represented Royalty to the *Custos Rotulorum*, who replied with a groan, "Oh, Lord, yes! If one could only smoke!"

For two miles and more the roads had been lined by rural folks waiting respectfully for the pageant to pass

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by; but as they drew near Vale Royal and entered on what had been Roxhall's lands, all the cottages which they passed were shut up; not a man, woman, or child was visible in the little gardens or in the fields beyond.

"I suppose the cottagers are all gone on to the churchyard," said a plump rector in one of the carriages, as he looked out of his window.

The town clerk, who was beside him, said in a whisper: "You won't see a man-jack of Roxhall's old tenants or peasantry show their noses to-day. They neither forget nor forgive."

"How very un-Christian!" said the plump rector, with a sigh.

"Fidelity's its own religion," said the town clerk, who had been born on a farm on Roxhall's land, and had hated to see the old homesteads and the familiar fields pass to the man from Dakota.

He was a true prophet. None of the peasantry or of the tenantry were visible on the roads or at the church of Vale Royal, which was within the park gates and surrounded by yew trees and holly hedges; they were loyal to their lost lord. Princes and nobles and ministers might truckle to the wealth of the dead man, but these men of the soil were faithful to the old owners of the soil. They despised the newcomer, living or dead.

The bishop of the diocese was awaiting the body, surrounded by minor clergy, in the little, dusky, venerable church, with its square Saxon tower and its moss-grown tombstones standing about it in the long grass (like those of Staghurst and of many an English God's-acre) under the yews, which were of vast size and unknown age. The coffin of William Massarene was placed in the middle of the aisle, as Carnot's in the Panthéon, and the wreaths were heaped round it in the grotesque and odious manner dear to the close of the most vulgar of all centuries. One of them, made of gloxinias, rose and white, had the card of the Duchess of Otterbourne attached to it. The sun shone mild and serene; the birds sang above the black figures of the mourners; the voice of the venerable prelate droned on like a bumble-bee buzzing on a window-pane; selections from Weber in E flat were played and vocalized

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with exquisite taste by admirable artistes; all the gentlemen present stood bareheaded and solemn of countenance, trying to look affected and only succeeding in looking bored. The daughter of the dead man assisted at the ceremony with revolted taste and aching heart. To her it was one long sickening penance, painfully ludicrous in its mockery and hypocrisy and folly. Every word of the burial service sounded on her ear like the laughter of some demon. Her father's life had been a long black crime, none the less, but the greater because one of those crimes which are not punished but rewarded by men; and he was bidden to enter into the joy of his Lord!

"Kathleen may say what she likes, but that pretty creature has shown a deal of heart," thought Margaret Massarene, kneeling under her overwhelming masses of crape before the heaps of gummed and nailed and wired flowers which were considered emblematic of the Christian religion and her lost William's soul. The pretty creature represented by the garland of gloxinias had written her a most affecting and even affectionate note on the previous evening, saying how grieved she was that a touch of bronchitis kept her confined to her room, as it prevented her attendance at the committal to earth of the remains of her kind and valued friend. That note Margaret Massarene had not shown to her daughter, but had wept over it and shut it up in her dressing-box.

"Kathleen's that hard," she had thought, as the crowds of South Woldshire were thinking it, "she wouldn't be made to believe in the Duchess's sorrow if the angels descended from the clouds to swear to it!"

Outside the church there were two brakes filled with wreaths from less distinguished givers piled one on another, as if they were garbage; for these there had been no room in the church. The savages who carry scalps and weapons to a dead chief's grave are considerably in advance of *fin de siècle* England in sense of fitness and consistency in funeral rites.

From the church, when the burial service was over, the body was borne to a mausoleum of granite, gloomy, dark and solemn, which had been the place of sepulchre of the Roxhall family for many centuries. The building above

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ground was of the eighteenth century, but the crypt beneath it was as old as the days of the great oak in the park which was called King Alfred's. Its subterranean vaults were spacious and spread far under arched ceilings, supported by short Doric pillars; here there were many knights lying in effigy on their tombs; many shields hung to the columns, many banners drooping in the gloom; here an ancient, gallant, chivalrous race had placed its dead in their last rest for a thousand years. The latest made grave was a little child's, a three-year-old daughter of Roxhall's, with a white marble lily carved on the marble above her, for her name had been Lillias, and she had died from a fall. The coffin of William Massarene was placed beside this little child's.

The keeper of a gambling den lay with the fair children, the pure women, and the brave men of an honored race.

To Katherine the desecration of the place seemed blasphemous.

How could Roxhall have sold the very graves of his race? She thought of his cousin Hurstmanceaux; *he* would have died sooner. As the choir sang the *Benedictus* of Gounod, and the sweet spiritual melodies warbled softly over the still open vault, she felt sick with the satire and the derision of the whole scene. The Lord-Lieutenant, who stood on her right, looked at her with anxiety.

"Do you feel faint?" he asked. "Is it too much for you? Ladies should not go through such trying ceremonies."

"I am quite well, thanks," she replied coldly; and he too thought what an uncivil and unfeeling person she was.

"I suppose she is not sure to inherit, and so is worried," thought the gentleman; he could imagine no other possible motive for so much coldness and so much evidently painful emotion.

"Well, 'tis all over," thought the dead man's widow. "But 'tis strange to think as so masterful a man as poor dear William is gone where he won't never have his own way any more!"

Her ideas of a future state were vague, but so far as they were formulated, they always represented immortal

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life to her as a kind of perpetual Sunday school, with much music and considerable discipline. She felt that William would be very uncomfortable with such limited opportunities for "making deals" and swinging his stock-whip, as it were, around him. She was a devoutly religious woman, but her common sense made her piety a difficult matter, as common sense is apt to do to many pious persons. She could not bring her mind into any actual conception of her dead husband as powerless to assert his will, or gone whither his banking books would be useless to buy him a warm place.

When the service was over and the bishop had spoken some beautiful impressive words, during the delivery of which every one present looked rapt and divided between ecstasy and anguish (Katherine alone having her usual expression of reserve and indifference), all the mourners and officials flocked across the park to the great house to enjoy, in their several places, according to their rank, the magnificent luncheon which was destined to be the last effort of Richemont in the Massarene service.

Katherine and her mother were, during the banqueting, closeted with the solicitors and administrators to hear the reading of the will. The executors were two solid and sagacious city magnates, for in business matters the testator had only trusted business men.

His daughter was undisturbed; she felt quite certain that he would have disinherited her. He would, she felt sure, have disposed of his millions in some splendid, public, and sensational way. His widow was visibly nervous and anxious.

"I never saw an inch into his mind in this matter," she thought. "'Tis quite likely as he'll cut us both off with a shilling."

To dispute his will, whatever it might be, never occurred as possible to one who had been his obedient slave nigh forty years.

She listened in strained and painful attention as she sat in the library with her daughter, and the great London solicitor, who had been the person chiefly trusted by Massarene, opened the monentous document and laid it before him, and, resting his hand upon it, said to the two women:

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"My dear ladies, there is no later will than that made ten years ago, which, with your permission, I will now proceed to read to you. It is to be presumed that the deceased always remained in the same dispositions of mind and feeling, since he has never even added a codicil to this document."

With that preamble he turned toward the light and read aloud a testament of much simplicity considering the enormous fortune of which it disposed. It left everything unreservedly to his only child, Katherine Massarene, and provided only that she should pay to her mother the annual sum of a thousand pounds a year. It left nothing whatever directly to his wife, not even jewels, and with the exception of a few bequests to hospitals and executors, provided for nothing else than the transmission of his entire property to his daughter, for her own absolute and unrestricted possession on the attainment of her majority: that age she had now passed by four years.

The envied inheritor of this envied and enormous wealth showed no emotion which they could construe into either surprise or exultation; her features might have been of marble for any change they displayed. An immense consternation paralyzed her. She had hoped that the dislike her father had conceived for her, and the disappointment she had caused him, would have led to his leaving away from her some very large portion of his wealth. She would not have been surprised, and she would have been infinitely relieved, if he had left her nothing at all. That she could by any possibility become sole mistress of this immense property which was so loathsome to her had never for a moment occurred to her. Royal legatees, public institutions, churches, endowments, asylums, any one of the many means by which the dead glorify their memory and purchase a brief respite from the cruelty of oblivion, would, she had imagined, have preceded her in her father's bequests.

She had forgotten the fact that to such men as William Massarene the continuation of their own blood in alliance with their wealth is absolutely necessary to their ambition. For that reason, although he had often thought of leaving his fortune to the Prince of Wales, or to the Na-

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tion, he had never actually brought himself to revoke the will in his only living child's favor.

Her mother sat still for a moment, a deep purple flush covering her big and pallid face. Then for the solitary time in all her life she rose with dignity to the exigency of a trying hour.

"Gentlemen," she said, in a firm voice to those present, "what is my child's is the same as though 't were mine, and she is learned and a true lady, and she'll grace all she gets. But my husband should hev thought twice before he put such a slight upon me, his partner for nigh forty year, who worked with him in cold and heat, in mud and sweat, in hunger and in sorrow. Still the pile was his own to do as he liked with, and never think, gentlemen, as I dream o' putting forward any contrary claim."

The gentlemen present heard in respectful silence. The fat, homely, vulgar woman was transfigured by the noble endurance of a great wrong.

On reflection men deride such sentiments, but their first impulse is to respect them and to salute them with respect. First thoughts are often best.

Katherine looked at her with deep sorrow in her eyes; but she sat quite still with no expression on her face, at least, none that the men present could construe.

The lawyers and executors timidly began to offer their congratulations; they were afraid of this stately, cold, mute, young woman, who gave no sign either of exultation or of mourning; it seemed to them, as it always seemed to every one, as if she could not possibly bear any relation to the dead millionaire.

She stopped their felicitations with a gesture, and rose.

"You will excuse me, sirs, if I cannot converse with you, and if I leave you now. After to-day I shall be always at your disposition for any business that may require me. Meantime, consider this house yours. Come, my dear mother."

She took her mother's hand and forced her to rise; then made a low formal curtsey to the men present and passed out of the room, leading her mother with her.

"Well, I never," said one of the city gentlemen.

"She knows the time o' day," said the other.

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"I think she'll be near," said the country lawyer.

"She's mighty grand and distant," said the first speaker.

The London solicitor said nothing. He admired her. But he felt that she would not be an easy client if she left the affairs in his hands. She would want to know the why and the wherefore of everything. No man of law likes that.

Katherine, when she was alone with her mother in her own rooms, bent down and kissed Mrs. Massarene's pale face.

"Oh, my dear mother, what a shame to you, what an injustice and insult! Oh, if I had only known what he had done when he was living! Why would you never let me speak to him of his will?"

Her voice shook with deep-rooted anger and exceeding pain. She was indignant to be made the instrument of her mother's humiliation.

"My dear, you wouldn't have altered him," said her mother, between her sobs. "He wished to lay me low, and he's done it. But he was a great man, was poor William, all the same. It's a bitter pill to swallow," she continued, between her sobs, "and I don't deserve it from him, for I toiled day and night for him, and with him, when neither of us had more than the clothes we stood up in, and 't was just what I made by washing and cooking as kept us on our legs for the first year in that blackguard township. Of course I was in the way of late years. He would have liked to take a young wife with a great name, and have sons and that like. 'Twas only natural, perhaps; I was but a clog upon him. But he forgot all the early years we toiled together."

"It is an infamy! His will is the greatest crime of an abominable life!" said Katherine, with deep wrath shining in her eyes and quivering on her lips.

"Hush! He was your father," said his wife. "And he was a great man; there's excuse for men as is great—they can't be tied down like common folks."

Then, poor soul, she leaned her head on her hands and wept bitterly.

This will, so short and simple in comparison with the

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enormous wealth it disposed of, had been the only one signed amongst the various testaments he had caused to be written. It had been made on his arrival in England when Katherine had been fourteen years old, when his ambitions had all centred in her, and on her head he had in imagination seen resting the circlet of some ducal coronet or princely crown.

Moreover he had always loathed the thought of death; to this man of iron strength and constant success the idea of something which was stronger than himself, and which would put an end to his success, was horrible.

The slight to his wife he would always have caused: he could not forgive her for not having died long before in Kerosene City. He went as near to hatred of her as a man of sluggish blood, and superstitious respect for custom and conventionality, could allow himself to do. She was a great burden, a drawback and disfigurement; she was stupid and tactless; she had no powers of assimilation; and in all her grandeur and glory she remained the Margaret Hogan of Kilrathy. He paid her out for her persistency in living on and being as incongruous in his fine houses as a dish of pigs' trotters would have been at one of his dinners for Royal Highnesses.

She had toiled hard with and for him in the Northwest; she had laid the first modest foundations on which he had subsequently been able to raise his golden temple; and for that very reason he detested her and cut her off with a meagre legacy, and recalled to her that her jewels even had been only lent to her, never given.

Philosophers and psychologists when they reason on human nature do not realize the enormous place which pure spite occupies in its motives and actions.

All the use she had been to him, all her industry, patience, affection, and self-denial had all counted for nothing with him; she was a blot on his greatness, a ridiculous figure in his houses, and her existence had stood in the way of his marrying some fair young virgin of noble race who might have given him an heir, and let him cut off his daughter with a shilling. He did not therefore make a new will, because he could not make up his mind to disinherit his only living representative; besides that,

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he felt that he had at least another score of years to live; and probably he would have reached his fourscore and ten and died an earl, as he intended to do, had not the bullet of Robert Airley cut short his career.

But the vengeance of a poor Scotch workingman had put an end to all, and his wife had survived him and was sobbing into her handkerchief whilst his daughter became sole inheritrix of his millions and estates.

He had made many other dispositions of his property, but as these others were all unsigned they were worth nothing at all in the sight of the law. His daughter was the richest woman in Great Britain, and all those whose offers of marriage had been rejected by her cursed her with the heartiest unanimity.

Meanwhile she herself felt as though an avalanche had fallen on her and overwhelmed her.

"That creature has got everything!" said the Duchess of Otterbourne, as she read the synopsis of the will in the newspapers. "Oh, why did Ronnie not make himself pleasant and marry her!" The soiled linen which she was conscious of having piled up against herself in the dead man's hand would at least have been washed *en famille!*

By the solicitor's and executors' request, Katherine who seemed to all who surrounded her the most favored mortal under the sun went to London on the day following the funeral. Her mother would not go with her.

"I'll never set foot in that house no more," she said; its gilded gates and marble staircase with the smiling nude boy of Clodion had become hateful to her. She was not physically ill, but she was nervous, depressed, cried for hours, and wished incessantly that she had never left the dairy and the pastures of Kilrathy. "I'm Humpty Dumpty tumbled off the wall," she said more than once. "All the king's horses and all the king's men won't put me together again."

"Oh, it is shameful, shameful!" said Katherine between her teeth. "And to make me the instrument to wound you! What cynical cruelty!"

She implored her mother to resist the will, to dispute it in court; to claim a proper share of a fortune which she had largely contributed to gain.

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But her mother would not hear of such a thing. "I ain't going to put good gold and silver in attorneys' pockets," she said resolutely. "I wouldn't bring William's will into litigation, no, not if I was starvin' on the the streets. He was a great man when all's said and done, and it won't be me as dishonors him." For she was very proud of him now he was gone and lying under his marble slab in the Roxhall's crypt; he had stuck a knife in her, as it were, but she did not complain of the wound; he had been the "bull-dozing boss" to the last and he had had a right to be it.

The natural bitterness she felt did not turn against him, but against her daughter.

"You'll marry very high *now*," murmured Margaret Massarene. "Lord! There's nothing you may not get if you wish it."

"I shall never marry," said Katherine; and through her memory passed the simile of the hangman's daughter.

She felt crushed to earth with the weight of this loathsome inheritance. It was odious to her as blood-money. Where could she go, what could she do, to escape from the world, which would see in her a golden idol whilst to herself only the clay feet standing in mud would be visible?

Outside Harrenden House there was the incessant movement of the London season at its perihelion; the gaiety, the haste, the press, the excitement, the display of a capital in its most crowded hour. Within all was gloom, silence, mournings. Only the boy of Clodion still laughed.

The weary work of examination, verification, classification, began; all the wearisome formalities which follow on the death of a rich man. The executors, the solicitors, and the household all alike felt awe and dread of the new owner of the fortune. Her silence seemed to them unnatural. She was always at the command of the men of business, and she was always perfectly courteous to every one, but they were afraid of her. She broke all the seals herself in the presence of those who had a right to be with her, and examined, herself alone, all the mass of documents left by her father. She had a presentiment that there

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must be much left behind him that would dishonor his memory, and disgrace still more grossly his debtors. She despised from the depths of her soul all those illustrious persons whose names figured on the secret ledgers with their Bramah locks which he had kept as rigidly as he had used to keep his books in Kerosene City when it was but an embryo township. But she wished to screen them from the publicity with which it was in her power to ruin them all; and shortly afterwards several great persons were at once infinitely relieved, embarrassed, and humiliated by having their obligations returned to them.

Strangely as it seemed to her, almost one of the first things she saw in a drawer of her father's bureau was an envelope with the superscription :—

"To be sent to the Earl of Hurstmanceaux immediately on my demise. W. M."

It was a small envelope and thin.

It seemed odd to her that her father should have left a missive for a man with whom he had no acquaintance and from whom he had received only insults. But she concluded that the communication must regard the affairs of Hurstmanceaux's sister. She gave the letter at once to a confidential servant to be taken to Hurstmanceaux's London address.

In half an hour the servant returned.

"His lordship has rooms in Bruton Street, madam; but he is out of town, they do not know where. He is yachting in the north of Ireland, they think; I left the letter to be given as soon as he arrives."

"Quite right," said Katherine; but she felt afraid that she ought to have sent it through some surer channel; by the superscription it was probably of importance, and no doubt treated of the Duchess of Otterbourne's affairs. She thought, too late, that it would have been wiser to have sent it to Faldon Castle, where she remembered he had said that he passed most part of the year.

In the same afternoon she received a note on black-edged paper with a duchess's coronet on the envelope. It said:

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"DEAR MISS MASSARENE.—*I could not tell you how grieved I have been at the appalling tragedy. I have thought so much of you in your bereavement, and of your poor mother. If I had not suffered from bronchitis I should have come in person to the funeral. I hope your mother received my note? It is all so dreadful and sudden one cannot realize it. Did my kind good friend leave no letter or message for me? You know how I trusted him in all my affairs, and the loss of his experience and his advice is to me an immeasurable misfortune. He was so wonderfully clever, and so willing to counsel and to aid! His loss can never be made up to any of us. In sincere sympathy I remain,* "*Ever yours affectionately,*

"CLARE OTTERBOURNE."

Katherine read the note twice over. She profoundly mistrusted the writer. It read very naturally, very unaffectedly; but it was wholly impossible that the writer could be sincere.

She was about to reply and say that her father had left a letter for Hurstmanceaux; but on second thoughts she doubted if she had a right to do so; the matter belonged to the person to whom the letter was addressed, who would tell his sister of its contents or not, as he chose.

She wrote, instead, a few brief polite distant words saying that she had as yet found no communication for the Duchess amongst her father's papers, and thanking her for her expressions of sorrow and sympathy.

"Why should she expect any remembrance from him?" she wondered. "Did she expect to be named in his will?"

She felt regret that Hurstmanceaux was out of town. She thought his sister quite capable of going to Bruton Street and intercepting the letter if she got wind of it. Perhaps, she thought, there was money in it; it had borne a large seal, bearing the newly-found arms of the Massarenes.

"Did my father ever speak to you of the Duchess of Otterbourne?" she asked his solicitor that afternoon.

"Never!" said the lawyer, with a passing smile.

"Did you ever hear that he helped her in monetary affairs?"

"No," said the solicitor, with the same demure suggestive smile hovering on his lips. "But everyone knows that Mr. Massarene was a great admirer of that lady."

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Katherine asked him no more. She lighted a match and burnt the sympathetic little note.

Meanwhile her own note was like lead on the heart of its recipient, who had made sure that some message, some bequest, would come to her from William Massarene. She knew the man so little, despite her intelligence and worldly wisdom, that she had actually believed that he might provide for the restoration to her, at his death, of her own and Beaumont's signatures, or would leave her some assurance that they were destroyed. As it was, in the absence of any indication, she could not tell that they might not at any moment be found by his daughter or his executors. Every moment of these weeks was a torture to her. She could not sleep an hour at night without anodynes.

It was now the beginning of July: the height of the season. She had to act in pastoral plays, keep stalls at bazaars, go to garden-parties, dinner-parties, marriages, *déjeuners*, flower-shows, Primrose gatherings, and be seen once at least at a Drawing-room. She did not dare give in, or go away, or pretend to be ill, because she was afraid that the world might suspect that she was worried by the consequences of Massarene's death. These days during which she knew that his heiress must be searching amongst his papers, reading his memoranda, and sorting his correspondence, were the most horrible of her life. She felt stretched on a rack from morning till night. Outwardly she was lovely, impertinent, careless, gay, as ever, and people wondered whom she would marry; but her mental life was one of the most restless conjecture, the most agonized dread.

As the days became weeks, and she heard nothing of any discovery made at Harrenden House, she began to grow quieter, she began to feel reassured. The signatures no doubt had been burnt. She persuaded herself that they had certainly been burnt. She did not dream that Beaumont's receipt and the type-written lines she herself had signed had been enclosed, without a word, in the sealed letter which was lying awaiting her brother at his rooms in Bruton street.

The same night that he had returned from Paris, Wil-

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liam Massarene, who never left till to-morrow that which should be done to-day, had put them in that envelope, had addressed and sealed them. "Now if I die my lady will remember me," he had thought. "She'll wish she hadn't called me Billy, and told me lies about the Bird rooms."

In his own way at that time he was fiercely in love with her; but his passion did not make him forget or forgive. It was a posthumous vengeance which he thus arranged; but it was a diabolical and ingenious one.

Every week from that night until the night before his murder he had looked at that letter and thought, with an inward chuckle, that if he fell down in a fit, or died of a carriage accident, his retaliation was safely arranged to smite her when he should be in his grave. In a rough vague way he believed in a God above him. Most successful persons do. But he did not choose to leave his revenge to the hands of deity. "Always load your rifle yourself," was his maxim in death as in life.

He knew that her brother was the one person on earth whom she feared. And the shell he thus filled to burst after his death would hit hard Hurstmanceaux himself, that damnable swell who would not speak to him even in a street or a club-house, and who had refused his heiress's hand before it was actually offered to him! "My lord'll sing small when he learns as his sister was saved from a criminal charge by Billy's dirty dollars," he had thought as he had prepared that envelope which his heiress now found in the hush and gloom of Harrenden House. He might have made his vengeance still more cruel. He might have left arrows still more barbed behind him to rankle in the breast of that proud man, of that penniless peer, who would never know him. But he had always attached great importance to reputation for chastity; he felt ashamed to admit in his mature years that he too had felt the temptation of a fair face and of a lovely form. He did not like to confess, even posthumously, his own frailties.

So he had only enclosed her signature and Beaumont's. They spoke for themselves. They were enough; they would leave to himself the glory of a generous action, and to her the shame of a mean one.

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CHAPTER XXXIII.

THERE was no one in London of the world which had been William Massarene's highest heaven. The August sun shone on the flower-beds of the parks in all their glory, and the poor forgotten plants which drooped in the balconies before shuttered windows, and the cats, forgotten also, mewed vainly in closed kitchens and behind iron railings, and the dogs, abandoned to servants and grooms, moped sadly in stable or basement yards, or, straying out into the streets and mews, were lassoed by the police or coaxed to their doom by the agents of experimental institutes. Katherine Massarene, all alone, stayed on at Harrenden House, absorbed in the enormous work of examining her late father's papers. Her mother remained in the country, whither Katherine went from Saturday to Monday to see her. But all the other days of the week the inheritress of Mr. Massarene's wealth spent in tracing the sources of that poisoned and blood-stained Pactolus.

He, like many another successful and masterful man, had never taken death into account, or he would have destroyed many of those written witnesses against him. As it was, he had kept everything, partly from the sense of power which it gave him to do so, partly from the prudent sharpness of a business man which made him never lose a letter, however insignificant, or destroy a signature, however unneeded. She could not understand all the meaning of these papers, but she understood much: enough to make her heart-sick with shame, frozen with horror. She had always known, vaguely, that his fortunes had been obtained mainly through crimes which in the successful man society has agreed to let pass as virtues; but she could now name, measure, analyze those crimes and see them in all their entity, as drops of blood are seen under a microscope.

Thus she became acquainted with all the steps which had conducted him from the straw of the cattle-shed to

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the carpets of Harrenden House. That small study, in which he had kept locked all his ledgers, folios, banking-books, and documents of every kind, seemed like a very charnel-house to its new visitant. She had read very widely; she had thought a great deal; and to her clear and cultured intelligence the true aims and objects of her father's life seemed as sordid and miserable as those of the ragged men whom she had seen in her childhood greedily washing river sand in tin pannikins in the hope of finding some gleam of gold, and ready to murder their bosom friend to secure a grain of the coveted metal.

Among those papers was the letter written by the Suffolk emigrant for Robert Airley. She read it, and it flashed across her mind that Robert Airley had come to England and had killed her father. There was nothing to suggest it, nothing to prove it; but she had no more doubt of it than if she had heard the confession of the assassin. She telegraphed to Kerosene City to inquire where Robert Airley was. It was telegraphed back to her that he had sailed for Liverpool on the 30th of May: her father had been shot on the night of the 17th of June: she had no doubt after this that her inference had been correct. And it had not been murder, but justice! Justice red-handed and rude—the *lex talionis*, but justice nevertheless.

Through suggestions from the American police, and Massarene's manager, the same suspicions were entertained by Scotland Yard. But Robert Airley was lost sight of on his arrival in London, and, as the woman of the eating-house held her peace and kept her own counsel, he remained untraced.

She said nothing of what she found and thought to her mother, and lived on in that state of isolated reflection and regret which can only be supported by those who are strong in character and independent of sympathy, but from which even they suffer greatly. She did not try to trace Robert Airley. When she heard that he was suspected of the crime but could not be found, she was relieved to think that he was lost to sight; his seizure and trial would have been agony to her. The horror of her discoveries and the shame of them filled her with a feeling

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as of personal guilt. She looked worn, unwell, aged; she had nothing in her regard, in her manner, in her thoughts, of the sense of freedom and power which all would have expected her to feel in such an accession to immense wealth, in entire liberty. She had no one to whom she could speak of anything which she felt. Lord Framlingham was in India, and he was the only person to whom she could have confided something of her anxieties, her shame, her uncertainty what to do and how to bear the burden laid upon her. She knew that she must carry all her knowledge shut up in her own breast as long as she lived. It lay like a stone upon her, as did the inheritance of all this ill-gotten wealth.

One day, when she was as usual in the little study poring over an old ledger, one of the servants brought her a card. On it was printed, "Earl of Hurstmanceaux." She was surprised, much surprised, but she remembered the letter her father had addressed to him. She hesitated some moments: if he came on his sister's business could he not go to the lawyer?

"Ask Lord Hurstmanceaux to be so good as to see the solicitors," she said to the servant, who returned in a few minutes with the reply that Lord Hurstmanceaux desired the favor of a personal interview.

"Show him into the library then," she said, much surprised. "I will come to him there."

She put back the ledger in its place, closed the case which held it, and left the room, locking the door with that safety-key which had never quitted her father's watch-chain in his lifetime, and which she carried now always on hers.

She did not go to her room to see how she looked, as most women would have done; she did not even glance at one of the mirrors in the rooms through which she passed. She went as she was, looking very white, very worn, very stern in her close black gown, to the other end of the house where the library was.

Hurstmanceaux was standing in the middle of the room; the light from one of the windows shone on his fair hair. She saw that he too was very pale and appeared distressed and embarrassed.

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"You wished to see me, Lord Hurstmanceaux," she said coldly. "Would not the solicitors have done equally well?"

"No," said Hurstmanceaux—his voice was harsh and unsteady. "I venture to beg of you not to make my errand known to your solicitors."

She was silent; she sat down and motioned to him to do the same, but he remained standing.

"You sent me a letter from your late father—Mr. Massarene?" he said—his voice seemed strangled in his throat.

"I enclosed one some time ago, yes."

"I have only now received it. I have been away yachting. Nothing was forwarded." His words came with difficulty; he spoke like a man to whom what he is obliged to say is torture.

"It does not concern me," she said coldly. "I have no wish to know what it contained."

"You must know," said Ronald. "It contained a signature of my sister of Otterbourne, who, it appears from another paper enclosed with it, owed to your father the enormous sum of twelve thousand pounds."

Katherine was silent: she thought that probably the Duchess of Otterbourne had owed very much more than that to her father.

Hurstmanceoux breathed heavily: he was overwhelmed with shame at what he was forced to say.

"Apparently," he continued, "she owed this amount to Beaumont, the jeweler in the Rue de la Paix. Your father sent me Beaumont's receipt to him, and my sister's acknowledgment of her debt to him, for the payment to Beaumont. She is now in Norway with the Bassenthwaites; but the two signatures make the matter quite clear. There is no necessity for any inquiry."

He paused, struggling with an emotion which he feared would get the better of his manhood.

Katherine saw that, and it affected her keenly.

"He sent you those signatures!" she said, as a sense of her father's cruelty dawned on her. "What a brutal, what an infamous thing to do! What a message from the grave!"

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"Mr. Massarene was quite within his rights," said Ronald stiffly: "wholly within them. As my sister's husband is dead, I am the person to whom her creditors should apply. I blame him for lending her such a sum, without my knowledge, in his lifetime. It is impossible to say to you what I suffer in finding her—in finding her——"

His voice broke down; for an instant he walked away to the window nearest him, and looked out in silence.

Katherine did not reply.

She was thinking of the many times, in her father's private account-books, in which Lady Kenilworth's name was written, the many slips in the old check-books in which there was also written, in her father's hand: "Drawn self: passed to Lady K."

What could she say? It seemed to her nothing, yet she felt acute sorrow for this proud, sensitive, honorable gentleman, who had the cruel humiliation of such a discovery and such a confession, after all his pride, his scorn, and his avoidance of her and of her parents.

In another moment he turned back from the window and walked toward her.

"I came to ask you, if you can, not to let your men of business know of this," he said more calmly. "I do not think there is any necessity for them to know. I regret unspeakably that I cannot repay this sum at once, but I am a poor man. In a month's time I hope to be able to do so. Meanwhile, if you can keep my sister's wretched secret, I shall be very grateful to you."

Katherine rose and looked at him, with some indignation and much sympathy shining in her large dark eyes.

"Do you think, because I am his daughter, that I have neither decency nor honor? Do not take this matter so deeply to heart. If my father lent the duchess money, she was, on her part, of great use to him. He owed his social position almost entirely to her assistance. I grieve more than I can say that he should have stabbed you from his grave like this. Nor can I imagine why he did so, unless to avenge himself for your persistent refusal to be acquainted with us; a mean motive, indeed, if it was his motive. Pray believe me, Lord Hurstmanceaux. Your

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sister's name is safe for ever with me; and as for repaying this money, do not think of it. The debt is not yours."

"Of my payment of it there must be no dispute," said Ronald quickly. "It was a strictly business matter. Your father was a business man. I would not ask even a day's delay were I not forced. I thank you for your promise of silence; it is more than I have deserved."

He tried to put the matter on a business footing, to endeavor to treat his sister's receipt of money from Massarene as though it had been a mere affair of agreement and mutual interest; but he was too frank to play a part, and he was conscious that he showed the shame, the disgust, the loathing which he felt for the false position of a woman so near to him.

"Do not speak of money to me," said Katherine, with an intensity of feeling which surprised him. "I have passed nearly every day since my father's death in seeing how the riches he loved were put together. I loathe so utterly all he has left to me, that I envy every work-girl who sews for daily bread in her garret. You said rightly on the road in Woldshire that such a fortune as ours is only amassed by wickedness, and cruelty, and fraud. If I could cast it from me as a toad its skin, I would not pause a moment before I did so, and fled from it for ever."

She was carried out of herself by the forces of feeling, which, for an instant, broke down her reserve, and hurried her into eloquent and unstudied speech.

Hurstmanceaux, at any other time, would have been moved to sympathy with her; but now he was too absorbed in his own humiliation and pain to have any perception of hers.

"You will soon get reconciled to your burden, madam," he said, with a slight and bitter smile. "Do not fear. The world will help you to get rid of it. Allow me once more to thank you for your promise of silence. I am conscious that both I and she are unworthy of your clemency."

Katherine's soul shrank within her. She felt all the recoil, the embarrassment, the revulsion of feeling of a reserved nature, which has unbent and revealed itself, and finds its expansion unresponded to and misunderstood.

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She felt that he did not believe in what she had said in the least.

"You have not heard your sister's defence," she said, after a pause.

"My sister's fables? I do not want to hear them. Her signature speaks for her. Besides, I can have the whole facts of the transaction from the jeweler. No ingenuity of hers can ever explain them away."

"You are very harsh."

"I am far from harsh. And of my harshness or my mildness you cannot be the judge."

"Why not?"

"Because you are the daughter of a man who knew nothing of honor, or of its exactions, and that instinct is not acquired in a single generation."

"Have twenty-three generations of nobility bequeathed it to your sister?" was the retort which sprang to her lips, but she generously and valorously kept it unspoken.

Her white skin flushed hotly and painfully at the insult, which was to her what a blow would have been to a man.

She did not resent, but she suffered intensely. What he had said was so completely the reflection of her own feelings that it seemed to burn itself into her brain like a branding-iron.

Oh, to have come of some stainless and valiant race, with traditions of a past great and pure! What she would have given for that heritage of barren honor, which would have been, in her keeping, virgin and puissant, as a kingdom guarded against every foe!

For an instant she was tempted to go and unlock the drawer in which all the memoranda of his sister's other debts were lying, and put them before him and say: "Did a thousand years of nobility teach honor and honesty to her?" But she resisted the temptation.

He was humiliated and embittered, and this insolence of his speech was, she thought, to be forgiven to him. She said nothing in protest or defence; but there was that in her expression which touched him to repentance for his utterance. He felt that she had deserved better at his hands, though he could not bend his pride to say so.

He was silent some moments, so was she—a silence of

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pain and of embarrassment. At length, with a great effort, he forced himself to say to her:

"I should not have said that. I beg your pardon. It was offensive."

She made a slight inclination of the head, as if to accept the apology.

"You said what is generally true, I believe. But there may be exceptions."

His apology could not efface the impression of his speech, which seemed like vitriol thrown in her face. The impression of pain which his speech left on her was so poignant that she felt as if it would never pass away.

He was violently and bitterly prejudiced against her; he was incapable of being just to her; she seemed to him steeped in the villainy of all that ill-gotten gold in which she had her being; but he could not but acknowledge the dignity and simplicity of her attitude under insult, and he was conscious that he had insulted her grossly. After all, the disgrace of his sister was no fault of hers.

She might be wholly in earnest when she said that she abhorred the wealth of which she was the sole possessor. He was tempted to believe that she was entirely sincere; but she was the daughter of William Massarene. She was *anathema maranatha.*

She bowed to suggest to him that his interview had lasted long enough.

"Good-day to you," she said coldly.

"Good-day," repeated Hurstmanceaux. "In a month's time you will hear from me. Meanwhile, forget if you can."

Then he left the library.

She remained standing beside the heavy table laden with choice octavos and the reviews of the month.

She had been tempted out of her habitual silence, and had opened a little window into her heart. And she regretted that she had done so, as, alas! we always do; for there is nothing which we regret so bitterly, and pay for so heavily, as the confidence we give. She was vexed with herself, also, that she had dismissed him so soon and so abruptly, that she had not endeavored to atone for that brutal action after death, that cruel legacy which her father had left in vengeance. She felt that he would pay

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the money back, if to do so he had to sell every rood of land he possessed, and she hated herself for having sent him, however innocently on her part, that barbed legacy of the dead. She understood how deep a wound it must have given to a man of the principles, the temperament, and the pride of Hurstmanceaux.

"But he is unjust to me—unjust and hard!" she said half aloud, in her solitude.

Meanwhile he, who had only returned to London an hour previously, took the tidal train to Paris, where he went forthwith to Beaumont.

"What would you, milord?" said Beaumont the following morning. "Madame la duchesse sent that old, fat, common man to pay in her name, and he paid. It was no matter to me who paid. I wanted my money back. Yes; I lent it on the big jewel and the others. Illegal! Oh, ta-ta-ta, milord! Of course all dealings with those pretty married ladies are great risks. We know that in business. That is why I was anxious to get back my money. If I had not had it, I should have gone to law. Perhaps my title to it was unsound, as you say. Perhaps it was. But *madame*, *votre sœur*, had had the money from me—she could not have denied that in a law court—and great families do not like scandals which touch them. Ah, no, milord! *noblesse oblige* we know!"

And Beaumont smiled softly, with a very sweet, sub-ironic, inflection of the voice, as he sat handling some uncut stones in his bureau which looked on the garden.

From him Hurstmanceaux obtained the certainty of what he had suspected from the moment that he had received Massarene's posthumous letter: that his sister had not had the Otterbourne jewels in her possession when he had asked her for them.

Heaven and earth! the duplicity of women!—he thought as he passed along the sunny Paris streets with a heart as heavy as lead in his breast. His sister, his blue-eyed Sourisette, his favorite from her nursery days, was no better than a thief! No better than any wretched woman of the streets whose *souteneur* might strike him with a knife in the gloaming that evening!

From Beaumont's he went to Boussod et Valadon's,

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and after an interview with that famous firm, returned to his favorite place of Faldon, where he had a small collection of old Flemish and Dutch pictures brought together in the previous century by his great-grandfather. They were not in the entail, and he had always been at liberty to sell them, but he had never been tempted to do so, for he was attached to the paintings and he liked to see them hanging in the oval room with a north light, where they had been for over a hundred years. He abhorred selling things, all his economies had been effected without selling anything: only by refraining from buying, which is an unpopular method. Dilettanti and dealers had all alike hinted to him that those pictures were worth a great deal, and that it was a pity to keep them in a secluded country place on the edge of the Atlantic. But he had always turned a deaf ear to such suggestions.

Now, he said to himself, the pictures must go. He had nothing else in his possession which would fetch a tenth part of his sister's debt to William Massarene. He was even afraid that the pictures would fail to realize the whole amount. But he asked for that amount and after some demur the price was accepted, the pictures were well known, and the money would be paid down, on their delivery in Ireland, to the agent of the great Paris house.

It was a matter easily concluded; but one which cut him to the quick.

However rapidly and privately it had been arranged the facts of the sale would not, he knew, be kept out of the newspapers. Paragraphs would appear in all the social and artistic journals to the effect that Lord Hurstmanceaux had sold his Dutch and Flemish collections of *petits maîtres*.

Every misfortune is nowadays doubled and trebled by the publicity given to it in the press, which turns the knife in our wounds and pours petroleum on our burning roof-tree. He would also be unable to explain to his friends why he sold them. He would appear like any other of the spendthrifts and idiots who sent to the hammer their libraries and pictures. No pressure would ever have forced him to make such a sale for his own pleasures or his own necessities.

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To a sensitive and proud man the comment which it would excite was worse to endure than all the blows of adversity.

"So you have sold your pictures after all!" a thousand tongues would say to him; and society would say that Ronnie had become like other people at last.

They are so silly, so unutterably silly, those flippant sneers of our acquaintances, and yet they irritate and wound like mosquitoes.

But he accepted these inevitable consequences and he went to Faldon, and saw them packed with his own eyes, and with his own hands placed in its wooden case with tender care a little flaxen-haired maiden spinning, of Mieris, which when he had been a child he had always called the portrait of his wife.

It was a cruel sacrifice to an unworthy object when the pictures went from their places, and the red sunset light coming over the Atlantic billows shone on the blank walls from which they had been torn.

Truly have the Rosny spoken of the *semi-humanité des choses!* the sympathetic companionship which we feel in those cherished things of our homes, wound as they are about the roots of our fondest memories, of our longest associations.

Two days later Katherine Massarene received a check on Coutts's, signed Hurstmanceaux, for the amount which her father had paid the jeweler *plus* the interest at five per cent. for two years.

It was enclosed with the compliments of the sender. A week later she saw in an art journal the announcement of the sale, to the Paris dealers, of the Dutch and Flemish collection of Faldon Castle.

It seemed to her as if her father's spirit rose from the tomb in malignant power for evil.

She put the check in one of the iron safes in the little study and turned the key on it.

He might send her the money in what way he would. He could not make her take it. But she had forgotten that this stubbornness might equal, and even exceed her own.

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CHAPTER XXXIV.

In the month of August Lord Roxhall, who was at Arcachon with his wife, ostensibly for health, in reality to cut short the expenses of a season in town, received amongst his correspondence a letter in a black-edged envelope addressed in a clear firm handwriting which was unknown to him, and bearing the postmark of his own country town, that town which William Massarene's funeral had recently passed through in such pomp and glory.

The letter astonished him, and he read it twice, incredulous of its meaning and wondering vaguely if it were genuine.

It was dated from Vale Royal and worded thus:

"My dear Lord Roxhall,

"*Pardon me that I have not earlier replied to your very kind letter of condolence on the terrible death of my father. Under his will I unfortunately become sole owner of all he possessed. He purchased this estate of Vale Royal of you, and I inherit it with the rest. I do not think we have done any harm here; we have perhaps done some material good, but the people on the estate dislike us and despise us. I quite understand and do not blame their feeling. I like and respect it. They are as faithful to you as Highlanders to Charles Edward. I cannot remain here, for neither my mother nor I care to reside amongst a justly disaffected population. My poor father bought your estate at a fair price no doubt; but it will never be morally or righteously ours. There are some things of which no amount of money can legalize the sale to a sensitive conscience. Will you do me a favor? Will you buy it back? I should only require half the purchase-money, and should be much obliged to you to let the other half remain on mortgage on the estate. I believe the value of land is decreased since he bought it, and of course you would have a valuation taken. Or I should be happy to comply with any other conditions which might be more suitable to you. In any way if you will take it off my hands as soon as the law permits me to dispose of it, I shall be greatly indebted and relieved of a heavy burden; for no one can do any good on a property where all the occupants*

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of the soil are their enemies. So entirely is my mother, as well as myself, convinced of this fact that we shall leave the place, never to return to it, in a few days' time, and the house will remain closed. I hope that you will before long go back to it.

"I remain, sincerely yours,

"KATHERINE MASSARENE."

He was breakfasting under the pine trees, his wife was opposite to him at a small round table. The letter astonished him and affected him, he discerned the generosity which was ill-concealed under its effort to make the offer seem to the advantage of the writer. When he had pondered over it for some minutes he passed it over the table to his companion.

"She would give it to us if she dared," he said as his wife took it. She read it quickly at a glance, as women do read, and looked up, the color rising in her face, her eyes radiant with hope.

"Oh, Gerald! Can you do it?"

"Do you care so much?" said Roxhall; his own voice was unsteady.

Lady Roxhall leaned her elbow on the table and covered her eyes with her hand to hide her emotion from the passers-by in the hotel garden.

"I could not tell you all I have suffered; I tried to conceal it; if it were only to have left the grave of Lillias to strangers——"

"You good little thing, to have been so silent!" said Roxhall, touched and grateful.

"Shall we go back, Gerald?" his wife murmured, her heart beating with mingled fear and hope.

"I think I could do it," answered Roxhall. "At least, if it is fair to take her offer. One must not come over this young woman because she is generous. Yes; I think with great pinching we could do it."

"I would live on bread and water all my life to go back!" said his wife with a force he had never known in her.

"I ought never to have sold it," said Roxhall, his thoughts reverting to his cousin's wiles. He took up the letter and read it again.

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"She would like to give it to us," he said a second time. "How very odd that such an unutterable cad as that man Massarene was should have such a daughter. I think I had better go to London to-night and see our lawyers. I will get the old place back somehow, if it's fair to her."

"Yes, one must be fair to her," said his wife, and added with remorse, "And to think how rude I have always been to her! I turned my back on them all three at the late State concert, just a week before the man was assassinated."

Roxhall laughed and got up to go and look at the railway time-table, and she rose too, and to avoid her many acquaintances went to walk by herself in the woods and commune with her own heart, and her longing to return to Vale Royal, and her wistful memories of her little dead child, Lillias. She was a gentle, brave, tender-hearted woman who had suffered much and concealed her sufferings courageously from both her husband and her world.

At the end of that month Katherine Massarene had ceased for a time her painful self-imposed task and gone down to Bournemouth, where she had taken a house for the autumn and winter; a villa in a pine-wood which looked on to the sea. It was a pretty place but to her mother it seemed a poor nutshell after the spaciousness and splendor of Harrenden House and Vale Royal. The diminished establishment, the comparatively empty stables, the loss of Richemont and his satellites, were at once a relief and an offence to her.

"One would think poor William had been sold up and we was livin' on my savings," she said in indignation.

"My dear mother, you could not keep up this place under three thousand a year," said her daughter.

"And what's that to us as had millions?" asked her mother.

Katherine thought of the primary plank hut at Kerosene City, but she saw that her mother was in no mood to remember those primitive times.

The Bournemouth residence was really pretty and had a simple elegance in it which was due to a great painter whose whim and pleasure it had been; and it was a fitting retreat for two women in deep mourning. But Margaret

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Massarene chose to consider it as a mixture of workhouse and prison. Her fretfulness and incessant lamentation made her companionship very trying, for it was the kind of obstinate discontent with which no arguments can struggle with any chance of success. One fine dim balmy morning, when the smell of the sea blended strongly with the scent from the pine-woods, Katherine was alone in the large room which had been the painter's studio and was now set aside for her own use, reading the still voluminous correspondence from her agents and solicitors. A young footman, who had not the perfect training which Mr. Winter had exacted in his underlings, opened the door and ushered in unannounced a tall fair man, who stood in hesitation on the threshold. "Lord Hurstmanceaux, ma'am," said the young servant, and shut the door behind the visitor's back.

Katherine looked up from her heavily-laden writing-table, and was vexed to feel that she changed color.

"My mother and I do not receive——" she said with some embarrassment.

Hurstmanceaux came across the room and stood on the other side of the table.

"You have not drawn the check which I sent to you on Coutts's," he said abruptly.

She answered merely "No."

"And why not?"

"Because I do not choose to take that money."

Hurstmanceaux's face grew red and very stern.

"You insult me, Miss Massarene."

"I do not mean to do so," said Katherine gently. "I begged you not to send it to me. My father, I am certain, never expected the duchess to repay it."

"That is very singular language. Do you mean that your father was on terms with my sister which would justify him in making her such gifts?"

She was silent; that was her meaning but she could not say so.

"If you do think it, you must cease to think it," said Ronald. "If there were any man in your family——"

Katherine looked him straight in the eyes.

"Pray do not let the fact of my sex influence you. I

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dare say I have many male relatives, but they are, I believe, navvies, and colliers, and laborers, and the like, who would not be foemen worthy of your patrician steel."

She spoke with a certain cold and careless contempt which brought the blood to his cheeks.

"You have full right to condemn my sister, but not to suppose what you do not know," he said with some embarrassment. "The debt was a matter of business, as a matter of business I treat it, and refund the money to you, who are the sole living representative of the dead creditor."

"There are many debts due to him. I have cancelled them all. They are all due from persons of your great world. He thought their suffrages worth buying. I do not. And I think the people who sell oranges and apples in the streets are superior to those who sell their prestige, their patronage, or their company."

Hurstmanceaux winced as he heard her, like a high-mettled horse flicked with the whip.

"I am wholly of your opinion," he said coldly. "But in this instance the debt is paid so far as a debt ever can be; and you are bound to take the payment of it. You are not bound to preserve silence on the matter, but if you do so you will make me grateful."

"I have told you that you may be certain of my silence," she said, with some impatience. "That is elementary honor which even I, low born as I am, can understand!"

"Honor does not require silence of you," said Hurstmanceaux. "But such silence will be a charity to us."

"Call it what you will," she replied curtly, "you may count on it."

"If you are a gentlewoman, madam," he added, in his coldest and most courteous manner, "you must also understand that you render my position insupportable unless you accept that money."

She did not immediately reply. She had not thought of the matter from his point of view. She reflected a little while, not looking at him, then she said, briefly:

"Very well. It shall be as you wish."

"I thank you," he said, with embarrassment; and after a pause added, "I thank you exceedingly." Then he

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bowed distantly, and left her without any additional words.

She sat in the same place for many minutes looking out over the grey sea which gleamed between the stems of the pines. Then she rose and went to a dispatch-box, in which she had placed all his sister's letters to her father, all proof of sums received by her, and all William Massarene's counterfoils of checks passed to her, and also the worthless bills of Cocky.

She put all these together in a large envelope, sealed it carefully, and sent it registered to the Duchess of Otterbourne at the post office of Bergen, where she knew that the steam-yacht in which that lady had gone to Norway was at anchor.

She thus put it out of her own power for ever, and out of the power of any who might come after her, to prove the shame of Hurstmanceaux's best-beloved sister. "He will never be dishonored through us," she thought.

The voice of her mother startled her and jarred on her.

"That's a handsome man as is gone out just now," said Mrs. Massarene. "'Tis the duchess's brother, ain't it?"

Katherine assented.

"He's his sister's good looks," said Mrs. Massarene. "But he never would know poor William. May one ask what he come about, my dear?"

"Only some business of his sister's," replied her daughter.

"He was always mighty high," said Mrs. Massarene. "I hope you're stand off too. Let him feel as you're your father's daughter."

Katherine shuddered in the warm, pine-scented, sea-impregnated air.

Mrs. Massarene, since the tyranny under which she had been repressed so long had been removed from her, was a more self-asserting and self-satisfied person. Her deep crape garments lent her in her own eyes majesty and importance, despite the slur which the will had cast upon her. She was William's widow, a position which seemed to her second to none in distinction. Death did for her lost spouse in her eyes what it often does for the dead with tender-hearted survivors; it made his cruelties dim and

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distant, it made his memory something which his life certainly had never been. That burial by peers and princes had been as a cloud of incense which was for ever rising about his manes. Royalty would not have sent even its youngest and smallest officer of the Household to represent it at any funeral which had not been the wake of all the virtues. Those towering heaps of wreaths had been in her view as a cairn burying out of sight all her husband's misdeeds and brutalities.

As ill-luck would have it, Daddy Gwyllian, who was staying at Cowes, crossed over to Bournemouth that morning to see an invalid friend. He was sauntering along in his light grey clothes, his straw hat, and his yachting shoes, when as he passed the garden gateway of the villa which Mrs. Massarene had hired, he encountered Ronald coming out of it.

"Ah! dear boy," he cried, in his pleasantest manner. "Making it up with the heiress, eh? Quite right. Quite right. Pity you've been so stiff-necked about it all these years."

Hurstmanceaux was extremely annoyed at this undesirable meeting. But he had nothing that he could say which would not have made matters worse.

"Where did you spring from, Daddy?" he said impatiently. "You are always appearing like a Jack in a box."

"I make it a rule to be where my richest and laziest fellow-creatures most congregate," replied Daddy. "And that in the month of August is the Solent. But come, Ronnie, let out a bit; you know I'm a very old friend. What are you doing down here if you're not paying court to Miss Massarene?"

"I am certainly not paying court to Miss Massarene," replied Hurstmanceaux, very distantly. "I was obliged to see her on business."

"Ah! Business is a very good ante-chamber to marriage," said Daddy, with a chuckle.

"It may be. I remain in the ante-chamber."

"Tut, tut! Of course you say so. You are really becoming like other people, Ronnie. I see you have sold your pictures!"

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"Is that anyone's affair but mine?"

"Well, yes, I think so. A sale is everybody's affair. There's nothing sacred about it. I always told you they were wasted at Faldon. Nobody saw 'em but spiders and mice."

Hurstmanceaux was silent.

"What an uncommunicative beggar he is," thought Daddy. "When one thinks that I've known him ever since he was in knickerbockers with his hair down to his waist!"

"Is it true that Roxhall buys back Vale Royal?" he asked.

"Ask Roxhall," said Hurstmanceaux, "and I fear I must leave you now and walk on faster to the station."

But Gwyllian held him by the lappet of his coat.

"They do say," he whispered, "that she's almost given it to him. You must know. Now do be frank, Ronnie."

"Frankness does not necessitate the discussion of other people's affairs. Ask Roxhall's wife; she is at Cowes; or go in and ask Miss Massarene; you know her."

He disengaged himself with some difficulty from the clinging hold of Gwyllian's white wrinkled fingers, and went onward to the station to go to Southampton, where his yawl was awaiting him. Daddy looked at the gate of the villa. Should he ring? No, he thought not. She was an unpleasant woman to tackle, hedgehoggy and impenetrable; she would be capable of saying to him, as Hurstmanceaux had done, that Roxhall's affairs were no business of his. She was one of those unnatural and offensive persons who, having no curiosity themselves, regard curiosity in others without sympathy, and even with disapproval. Daddy, feeling ill-used and aggrieved, turned down a lane bordered by rhododendrons and eucalyptus, and went to lunch with his sick friend, to whom he imparted *sotto voce* the fact that he thought Ronald would come round and marry Miss Massarene.

"He's always been such a crank," added Daddy. "But he's begun to sell. That looks like coming to his senses —doing like other people."

"It is certainly doing like many other people," said his sick friend with a sad smile, for he had seen his own col-

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lections go to the hammer. When Gwyllian, a few hours later, went comfortably back over the water in a steam-launch to East Cowes, he reflected as he glided along on what he had heard. Being a sagacious person, he connected the sale of the Faldon pictures with the visit to Katherine Massarene. "He's either paying some debt of his sister's or he's helping Roxhall to buy back the place. He's such a confounded fool, he'd give his head away; and I dare say the young woman is sharp about money; wouldn't be her father's daughter if she wasn't." So he came very nearly to the truth in his own mind as he sat in the launch, whilst it wound in and out among the craft in the roads.

It was no business of his, but Daddy Gwyllian had always found that guessing what hands other people held was the most amusing way of playing the rubber of life; at least, when you are old, and only a looker-on at the tables.

"They do say she's almost given it to him." The words rang in Ronald's ears as he went on board his old yawl, the *Dianthus*, and crossed to the island. Roxhall had not spoken to him of the matter; he only knew what was, by that time, table-talk, that Vale Royal was to return to its original owner so soon as the law permitted Katherine Massarene to dispose of any portion of her inheritance. Meantime, the house was closed. Roxhall had not sought him on the subject, and he felt that if they discussed it, they would probably quarrel, their views would be so different. It was very bitter to him that any member of his family should again be indebted to the Massarene fortune. It seemed as if the very stars in their courses fought against his will. Why had not Roxhall simply replied to her overtures, as he himself would have replied, that the sale of the estates, once having been made, could not be annulled?

As it was, all the world was talking of her generosity. It was intolerable! She had meant well, no doubt, but Roxhall should have taught her, as he had taught her, that men who respect themselves cannot receive that kind of favors.

"Why did you let him accept the return of the prop-

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erty, Elsie?" he said to Lady Roxhall, whom he saw on the club terrace at Cowes as soon as he landed there.

Lady Roxhall colored a little.

"Perhaps we ought not to have done so. But, oh, my dear Ronald, I shall be so rejoiced to go back! It was very good of Miss Massarene to offer its release," she added, "so rude as we have all of us been to her."

"You cannot be rude any more," said Hurstmanceaux. "You have sold your freedom of choice for a mess of pottage. You have accepted this lady's favors. You must embrace her in return if she exacts it."

"How irritable Ronald has grown," thought Lady Roxhall. "He used to be so kind and sweet-tempered. I suppose it is his having to sell his pictures that sours him. I wonder why he did sell them?"

Hurstmanceaux, before he went on board to sleep that night, wrote a letter at the R. Y. S. Club, which it cost him a great effort to write.

"But it's not fair for all the generosity to be on her side," he thought. "We must look like a set of savages to her. We have not even the common decency to thank her."

"MADAM,—

"*Circumstances, on which it is needless for me to dwell, make it impossible for me to have the honor of any intercourse with you in the future. But do not think that I am, for that reason, insensible to the nobility, generosity, and kindness which you have displayed in your dealings with more than one member of my family, and the forbearance you have shown to one wholly unworthy of it. For the silence you have kept in the past, and have offered to preserve in the future, I pray you to accept my sincere gratitude. I beg to remain, Madam,*

"*Your obedient servant,*

"HURSTMANCEAUX."

This letter brought tears to the eyes of the woman to whom it was addressed, although she was but very rarely moved to such emotion. "Why should we be strangers," she thought, "because of the sins or the crimes of others?"

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She drew the check which he had sent her on his bankers, but she gave, at the same time, a commission to a famous art agent in Paris to buy back the Dutch and Flemish pictures of the Faldon Collection from the dealers who had purchased them, and on no account to let her name appear in connection with the purchase.

Why should an honest and gallant gentleman lose heirlooms because his sister had been as venal as any courtezan of ancient Rome or modern Paris? How she would be able ever to restore them to him she did not know; meantime, she saved them from the hammer.

She thought that she would leave them to him by will, in case of her own death, with reversion to the National Gallery if he refused to accept them, and to restore them to their places at Faldon.

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CHAPTER XXXV.

At the head of a Norwegian fjord, where the tents of a gay and aristocratic party of travellers had been pitched on the green sward for a merry month or two of fishing and shooting and canoeing, the postbags were brought up the valley on the back of a stout mountain pony one fine cold day at the end of the sporting season. Sir Henry Bassenthwaite, leader and host of the expedition, was a newly-made baronet, a very rich brewer, one of those persons who bear with them a trail of electric light and a cloud of gold dust as they rush through unsophisticated lands which they annoy by their impertinence, and console by their expenditure.

Sir Henry took the letter-bags, untied them, unsealed them, and distributed their contents to his party.

"A round dozen for you, Duchess!" he cried gaily, as he held them above his head.

The Duchess of Otterbourne, who was seated on the turf leaning against a boulder, grey with lichens, amongst the cloud-berry with her rod and kreel beside her, and a little court of men round her, received her letters with that quickening of the pulse under apprehension which was frequent with her since she had been taught to tremble by William Massarene. The dread of a posthumous retaliation was always upon her: she never now saw a closed envelope without an inward shiver of apprehension.

Instinctively she rose and walked to a little distance with her back to her companions, and stood still on the edge of the foaming, crystal-clear, noisy river into which a little while before she had been throwing her line.

She broke the seals with unsteady fingers. She hastily scanned assurances from Whiteleaf that the children were well. Then she took up the rest of the correspondence, and her heart stood still as she saw a large packet sealed with six large black seals and addressed to her in a handwriting which she knew at a glance to be Katherine Mas-

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sarene's. There must be some message from the dead at last!

Out of the linen-lined envelope there fell many letters in her own writing, and the counterfoils of many checks made out to her own name and signed "W. M.," and many others marked, "Drawn self, passed to Lady K."; there were also bills signed by Cocky. Then she understood.

The daughter of William Massarene knew all, or at least knew much, and must guess what she did not know. She turned cold with fear; the whirling water made her giddy; she gasped for breath and clutched the stem of a young rowan-tree.

She, who had but scanty belief in generosity, wondered how many signatures of hers might not have been kept back by the sender?

Of all these things of the past she had, herself, but the most confused recollection. In the early time, when Billy had been as Pactolus to her insatiable thirst, she had never kept any account of all she drew from him directly or indirectly.

But whether all which compromised her were restored or not, the main fact remained the same: his daughter must *know*.

And the signatures concerning the diamonds—where were they? Katherine Massarene might or might not have restored all the rest; but she had not sent her those.

Where were they? Those which mattered most of all? It was mere mockery of her fears to send her back all these others and withhold from her the proofs of the transaction with Beaumont.

It was cruelty, odious, tantalizing, cat-like cruelty, playing with her only to humiliate and degrade her more!

"I always tried to be pleasant with her, and she never would respond," she thought, with that sense of never being the least in fault herself, which so happily consoled and sustained her at all times.

She heard steps approaching and she tore with frantic haste in little bits all her own letters and receipts and Massarene's counterfoils, and flung them with the black-sealed envelope into the boiling stream, which eddying amongst its rocks swallowed them under spray and foam.

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The trout leaped up alarmed from the upper water, the field-fares and redwings flew up frightened from the cloudberry bushes. The camp-ponies tethered near whinnied nervously.

"What a destruction of correspondence!" said the voice of Sir Henry. "What have the writers done to you, Duchess?"

With that marvellous power of self-command which the habit of the world teaches, she turned to him and laughed a little.

"All advertisements!—and six sheets from Fraulein Heyse about the children. Such a disappointment, the envelope looked so imposing."

"For a clever liar at a pinch commend me to Cocky's widow," he thought.

When, a few days later, the whole party, warned by a snowstorm, rode down the mountains and through the meadows to Bergen to rejoin Sir Henry's schooner, which was in harbor there, she, who was the gayest and noisiest amongst them, thought of nothing but of those two missing signatures.

To have had the others returned was useless whilst these two were out of her hands and in the power of someone unknown. She felt anxious to get to England, though what to do when she should be there in this matter she could not tell: tell the truth for once, perhaps—that last refuge of the desperate—in an appeal to Katherine Massarene's mercy.

When she went on board the Bassenthwaite boat—a fine vessel which had gone all round the world—Sir Henry met her cheerfully; he had preceded the party by two hours.

"Here's a pleasant surprise, Duchess," he cried. "Your brother's yacht's in the roads; she was signalled this morning."

"The *Dianthus?*" she asked, startled and dismayed.

"The *Dianthus*—yes," he replied. "You will have some message, no doubt, soon. It is a surprise, eh?"

"A very great surprise," she answered. "I thought Hurstmanceaux was in the Irish Channel."

Bassenthwaite was astonished at her evident vexation.

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Under the plea of fatigue she went to her cabin. She was alarmed beyond expression. That intuition which does duty for wisdom in many women told her that her brother had the missing signatures—that it was on their account that he had come into the North seas.

William Massarene was dead: would the ghost from his grave never cease from pursuing her? She felt chilly and ill-used.

It was dinner-time: she was obliged to laugh and talk and look her best; the German Emperor's yacht was in the harbor; there were fireworks, illumination of the shipping, bands played; the Bassenthwaite schooner was a blaze of light and fire; there was dancing on deck; the Kaiser came on board and was very pleasant.

She had to appear to enjoy it all, while her heart grew sick as she gazed past the lights outward to the darkness of the offing to where they said that the *Dianthus* was riding at anchor.

Early next morning they announced to her that a message had come for her: one of her brother's men had brought a note. It was extremely brief, and requested her to come to him by the boat he sent.

She wrote in answer: "The Bassenthwaites hope you will come and lunch. We weigh anchor at three o'clock. I cannot come to you."

When Hurstmanceaux received this answer by his sailor's hands, he was pacing his deck in great anger to see his boat returning without her.

He did not know the Bassenthwaites; he did not wish to know them; and at this moment of all others he could not have endured to meet her before strangers.

He wrote again: "I desire you to come in my boat. I am here only to see you. I have your signature and Beaumont's"—and sent his sailors back to Bassenthwaite's schooner.

It was no more than she had expected, but she felt as if all the ice of the Pole were drifting down and closing on her when she saw his men returning. She dare not disobey the summons. She went in the boat from the *Dianthus*.

"I wonder what she'll hear when she gets there," said Bassenthwaite to his wife.

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"Nothing pleasant, I suspect. He is an odious man," said his wife. "He thinks the Courcys of Faldon were made before Adam."

The despatch of the letters and receipts from Katherine Massarene had, in a measure, prepared her for worse to come. She had not for a moment attributed the sending of them to a movement of generosity. She had supposed that "Billy's daughter" took that form of vengeance as the simplest and the easiest, and she did not hope for an instant that the secrets contained in that packet would be respected. Therefore she was the less surprised, though the more alarmed, when the curt command of Hurstmanceaux was brought to her.

She immediately concluded that Katherine Massarene had been his informant against her.

She was not an instant alone after his message came to reflect on what course she should pursue, and could only trust to her usual good fortune to bear her through this crisis, as it had borne her through many another. But as the boat threaded its course through the craft in the roads, she felt a sharper terror than she had ever known, even in the presence of William Massarene, as she saw across the water the well-known lines of the old yawl.

When she reached the yacht at the entrance of the roads, she found, to her surprise, that Hurstmanceaux was not on deck to receive her.

"Is my brother unwell?" she asked of his skipper.

"No, madam," answered the old man. "I was to ask your Grace to be so good as to go below."

She went down the companionway. Hurstmanceaux rose in silence, and closed the door on her of his cabin when she had entered. He had felt it impossible to force himself to meet her before his crew.

She endeavored to laugh.

"How very tragic you are!" she said, mastering the great fear which froze her blood; "and how extremely rude!"

"I have your signatures," he said, as he stood before her in the plain little cabin of which the only ornaments were two large photographs of Faldon and a sketch by Watts of his mother.

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"I suppose, if you have them, you have thrown away a great deal of good money in getting them; and you might have spent it better," she replied with airy nonchalance.

He was so astounded at her levity, indifference, and insolence, that for some moments he was mute.

"I don't like being ordered about like this," she continued. "It looks very odd to the Bassenthwaites. Why didn't you come to luncheon? You could have talked to me afterwards on deck. When did you see the children?"

A great oath broke from his lips.

"Have you no decency? No conscience? Do you not understand? Amongst his papers a letter of Massarene's was found to me; it contained your signature to him for twelve thousand pounds plus interest, and another signature to Beaumont, the jeweler with whom you placed the Otterbourne jewels in pawn."

His words said all: he expected to see her overwhelmed by shame. But she preserved her equanimity.

"You might have sent them to me without coming out to Bergen," she said with impatience. She spoke with her usual tone, a little more impertinently than usual; but her lips were very pale.

"What did Billy tell you?" she added between her teeth. She felt sick with fear.

"Mr. Massarene told me nothing. Beaumont, whom I saw subsequently, told me everything."

She breathed more freely. Billy might have done worse than he had done. Beaumont of course knew nothing, except the fact of this debt and its payment. She sat down in a low reclining chair and leaned back in it, and put her coat with its big gold buttons and wild-rose perfume on the cabin table.

"Did you come out here only to say this?" she asked in a very bored tone; she wondered why she had so terrified and tortured herself: whatever Ronald knew he would not say to others.

Her attitude, her tone, her surpassing insolence and coolness broke the bonds of his patience, the storm of his wrath and of his scorn burst; he spoke as had never

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thought to speak to any woman. All the pain and humiliation he had suffered through her, of which he had been able to say no word to any living soul, found outlet in a flood of furious reproach.

She listened, indifferent, taking a cigarette off the cabin table and lighting it from a fusee box which she carried in the breast pocket of her serge jacket. The whole thing was odious to her in its recollection; but it was past and Massarene was in his grave, and had taken her secrets with him except as regarded her debts. Ronald might rave as he would; he would not kill her, and he would not expose her to other people. It was a wretched scene to have to go through, but after all scenes only take it out of one. One doesn't die of them. So she sat still, swaying gently to and fro, and smoking, while the bitter shame and suffering, which her brother expressed, rolled like a tempest over her head and left her unmoved, unrepentant.

"To think that you come of my blood—that you had my name!" he said with hot tears scorching his eyes. "To think that you were once a little innocent child whom I carried about in my arms at Faldon! You are a mass of lies, a tissue of infamy; your very breath is falsehood. You have not even such common shame and honesty as we may find in the poorest women of the streets. Poor Otterbourne said once to me that your influence was a moral phylloxera. How true, good God! how true! They tear up and burn the tainted vines. We ought to slay such women as you!"

She laughed a little, but her eyes flashed fire.

"A moral phylloxera! I never knew poor Poodle say anything so clever. How long is this scene to last? I really see no good in it. It seems to relieve your feelings, but it offends my taste. You appear to forget that though you are my children's guardian you are not mine."

"I am the head of your family and your trustee."

"I know; and you can annoy me in any way about money, as you always have done; but there your power ends. I should not have been obliged to have recourse to others if you had showed more feeling for my position. But you never showed me any sympathy. I saw in the

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English papers that you had sold the *petits maîtres*. Why did you not sell them before, and give the proceeds to me?"

He looked at her in silence.

"It was the same thing with the jewels," she continued. "You could have induced the others to leave them with me until Jack's majority. But instead of that you talked high-flown stuff about the law and your duties, and you cared nothing at all what injury and difficulty you caused to me."

He was still silent; she took another cigarette, lighted it, and again continued:

"You blame me for what I did. I did what I could. When the hare runs for her life she doesn't look where she goes. The diamonds are none the worse for being with Beaumont. They were quite safe with him. If my husband had lived, nobody would have known anything about the transaction. His death, immediately on his succession, was disastrous in every way."

"Do you mean that your husband was aware of this loan?"

"Yes, certainly," she said a moment later, without hesitation, for Cocky could not contradict her. "It was his idea first of all."

"It could not have been his idea to borrow of Mr. Massarene, for that transaction took place two months and a half after his death at Staghurst."

"He would have thought it a very good idea if he had been alive!" she said with her short, satirical little laugh: she was afraid of little now, for she saw that her brother knew nothing beyond the mere fact of the loan. "As for the reproduction of the jewels in paste, which you seem to think a crime, several women I know wear imitations of their jewels for safety in these days of ingenious thefts, and leave the originals in deposit at their bankers."

Hurstmanceaux looked at her in silence, wondering why a creature so fair should be born without a conscience. Was she really without one, or was this indifference only a part of the attitude she assumed? Was there something still worse which he did not know?

He felt that despair which overcomes a brave man be-

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fore the shamelessness of a woman. What could he do? He could not kill her. He could not disgrace her. To awaken any conscience in her was hopeless. If she did feel any humiliation she would not show it. For a moment a red mist swam before his eyes and a nervous tremor passed along his muscles; he longed to stamp the life out of her and bruise her accursed beauty into nothingness as a man of Shoreditch, or Montmartre, or the Calle of Venice might have done under such provocation as was his. The moment passed, of course. He could only realize his own powerlessness. There is nothing on earth so powerless as the impotence of a man of honor before the vileness of a woman who is dear to him.

He moved a step nearer to her and gazed down on her with a look which made her lower her sunny audacious eyes.

"You had more money than this from Massarene?"

Regaining her courage, and remembering that Katherine Massarene had probably sent her all her other signatures, she rose and faced him, throwing her fresh cigarette on the table.

"I do not admit that you have the smallest right to interrogate me. There is no one living who has. Marry his daughter, and you and she can look over his old check-books together. You are my children's keeper, but you are not mine, and I entirely refuse to answer your insults."

It was clear, she reflected, that Massarene had told him nothing except the facts concerning the diamonds. He might flounder about in a sea of conjecture, and make himself as wretched as ever he pleased; she was not so simple as to confess to him.

He stood above her, and his hands fell heavily on her shoulders and held her as in a vice.

"You had more money than this from Massarene?"

She was silent.

He still held her motionless, and a thrill of intense physical fear passed through her.

"You gave yourself to that brute for lucre?"

She was silent.

"If I wrong you, look me in the face and say so."

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He waited; still holding her motionless.

She tried to lift her eyes and look at him; she had never before quailed before any duplicity, never before been unequal to the demands which any necessity for falsehood put upon her. But now, for once, she dared not meet the eyes of this man whose lifelong affection she had abused, and whose family she had dishonored. For once she could not lie; for once her defiant audacity failed her; for once, for a brief passing moment, she saw herself as he would see her could he know all. Standing before him, in his grasp, her head drooped, her whole form trembled, her eyelids closed; she dared not meet his gaze.

He understood.

He released and thrust her from him.

"Would to God our mother had never borne you!"

He grew pale as ashes; for the moment he had difficulty to restrain himself from striking to the ground this woman who had dishonored his race.

She took her coat off the table and turned away.

"Take me to the boat," she said imperiously. "I scarcely suppose you want your crew to see that we have quarrelled?"

He opened the door of the cabin. "Be so good as to accompany the duchess, Mr. Evans," he said to his skipper; and he went back into the cabin and closed and bolted the door.

The faint, sweet scent of wild-rose essence was on the air and on the table where her coat had been lying. He dropped into the chair where she had sat, and, leaning his head on his hands, sobbed like a child.

She went back over the harbor-water talking pleasantly with Evans. "My brother grows such a hermit," she said to him. "It is a great pity that he avoids society. He is becoming quite morose."

"Morose? No, your Grace," said the old man, who adored his owner. "But it is certain his lordship leads a lonesome life. When we're in any port, he don't go ashore o' nights to sup and play and lark as other gentlemen do. But there aren't his equal for goodness and kindness, madam, anywhere; no, not in the 'varsal world."

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"It is very nice of you to say so," she replied, buttoning the big gold buttons of her coat; her spirits had risen; she was not afraid of her brother any longer; he had said his worst and she had made him feel his impotence. After all it did not really matter what he knew or guessed, he would not talk.

"My poor darling, has he worried you?" said Lady Bassenthwaite, full of sympathy, when she returned.

"Worried me? I should think so!" she answered. "He insists on my shutting myself up at Whiteleaf, and says Boo is to have no more Paris frocks. Pray give me some tea, I am worn out with being lectured!"

Lady Bassenthwaite's sympathy did not include credulity.

"He can't have come out all the way from Cowes to Bergen only to talk about Boo's frocks," she said later in the evening to her husband.

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CHAPTER XXXVI.

KATHERINE MASSARENE was as unhappy as it is possible for a person to be who has no personal crime on their conscience, and has all their personal wants supplied. She was incessantly haunted by the sense of her father's wickedness. True he had never gone to windward of the law; he had never done anything which would have enabled the law to call him to account. But his actions seemed to her all the worse because of that cold-blooded caution which had kept him carefully justified legally in all which he did. His own advancement had always been his governing purpose; and he had been too shrewd to imperil this by any excess in overreaching others, such as might have made him liable to law. He had dealt with men so that they were always legally in the wrong: for moral right he cared nothing. To his heiress all his wealth seemed blood-stained and accursed. She seemed to herself blood-stained in keeping or using it. Some part might possibly have been gained by industry, frugality, and self-denial; but the main portion of it had been built up on the ruin of others. In any case she would have felt thus, but the words of Hurstmanceaux had been like electric light shed on a dark place where murdered bodies lie. His scorn cut her to the heart. She did not resent it; she admired it; but it cut her to the quick.

This was how all men of honor and honesty must regard the career of William Massarene; if the world in general had not done so it was only because the world is corrupt and venal itself and always open to purchase; the world it may roughly be said does not quarrel with its bread and butter. But what Hurstmanceaux felt was, she knew, that which every person of high principle would feel with regard to the vast ill-gotten wealth which she had inherited. She did not even quarrel with the patrician temper which had insulted herself; it was so much better and worthier than the general disposition of the times to condone anything to wealth.

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She suffered under it, but she did not resent it. Individually, to herself, it was unjust; but she could not expect him to know that or to believe in it.

It did not help her on her difficult road; but it made her see only one issue to it.

This she saw clearly.

She walked slowly one day through the wood which was a portion of the little property; between the pine stems the grey water of the Channel was seen, dreamy, misty, and dull in a sunless day. Some colliers and a fishing-lugger with dingy canvas were drifting slowly through the windless air, under the low clouds. Her thoughts were not with the landscape, and she paced absently the path, strewn with fir needles, which led to the cliff. She was roused by a little dog bustling gaily through the underwood and jumping upon her in recognition, whilst her own dog, whom she called Argus, immediately investigated the stranger's credentials. A moment or two later pleasant cherry tones, which she had last heard on the deck of the steamer leaving Indian shores, reached her ear. "Hello, Miss Massarene! Whisky knows old friends. How are you, my dear? I was coming up to your house."

She turned and saw Lord Framlingham, with great pleasure: she had heard that he was in England for a few weeks, but had scarcely hoped to meet him unless she went up to town for the purpose.

"Did you really come down here only to see me? That is very good of you," she said gratefully.

"The goodness is to myself. Besides, I could not show my face to my girls if I went back without having a chat with you. No thanks. I have lunched. If you are going for a walk, Whisky and I will go with you.

"Is this big rough fellow yours?" he added, looking at Argus. "I dare say he's very devoted, but I can't say much for his breeding."

Katherine laughed slightly. "How like an Englishman! Why are 'humans' the only animals in whom you do not exact breeding?"

They went on through the woods talking of his family, who had remained in India, and of the political matters

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which had brought him home for a personal conference with the Home Government. When they came out on to the head of the cliff they sat down in sight of the sea.

"How homelike it all looks! That brown lugger, those leaden clouds, that rainy distance."

He was silent a minute or two, touched to the vague sadness of the exile. Then he turned to her.

"Now tell me of yourself; I have thought much of you since your father's death. It was a frightful end."

"It was."

"Do you remember our long talk under the magnolias? How little we thought then that his ambitions would so soon be over! You don't look well. It must have been a great shock."

She gave a gesture of assent.

"And you are sole mistress of everything?"

"Yes."

"That is an immense burden."

"Yes."

"You must get some one to bear it with you. Pardon me, but I am as interested in your future as if you were one of my daughters. I saw something in a society paper about you this morning. I devoutly hope it is true."

"What was it?"

"That you were about to marry Lord Hurstmanceaux."

"What!"

She rose from her seat as if a snake had bitten her, her colorless skin grew red as a rose, her eyes blazed with an indignation for which her companion was puzzled to account. "Whoever dare—whoever dare——" she said breathlessly.

Framlingham was astonished. "Come, come, my dear; there's nothing in the report to put your back up like that. I don't know him personally, but I have always heard that he is a very fine fellow—poor—but that wouldn't matter to you; on my word, I don't think you could possibly do better. You might get much higher rank, of course, but then you don't care about rank. Pray be seated and calm yourself."

"How could such a falsehood possibly be put in print?" she said nervously.

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"You might be more astonished if you saw a truth in print," said Framlingham with a chuckle. "So it's no foundation, eh? Do you know him?"

"Slightly. He called on me on business a few weeks since. But he is the very last person on earth of whom a statement of that kind could ever possibly be true."

"Humph!" said Framlingham, and he threw a dead stick for Whisky to fetch.

"His sister played fast and loose with your father's money, didn't she?" he asked.

"I would prefer not to speak of her."

"All right," said Framlingham rather disappointed. "But because you don't like the sister that is no reason to refuse the brother. I have always heard that she is a thorn in his side."

"There could be no question of refusal or acceptance," said Katherine, exceedingly annoyed. "Lord Hurstmanceaux and I scarcely know each other; and there is no one who more thoroughly despises myself and my origin than he does."

Framlingham was very astonished, and sent Whisky after another stick.

"He can scarcely have told you so?" he said. "Hie—good dog—bring it!"

"He has told me so in most unmistakable terms. Pray don't think that I blame him for a moment; but you will understand that, knowing this, such a report as you speak of in the papers is incomprehensible to me and most odious."

"Necessarily," said Framlingham, as he looked at her with his keen sagacious grey eyes and thought to himself, "It is well to begin with a little aversion. He may be odious to her, but I doubt if he is indifferent."

Katherine was silent; the momentary color had faded out of her face; her gaze followed the grimy canvas of the collier as it sailed slowly to westward.

"Well, I'm sorry," said her friend, as he patted his skye-terrier. "He's a good man, and I should like to know you were in the hands of a good man, my dear. You will have all the royal and noble blackguards in Europe after you, and you have nobody I think to advise

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you, except your lawyers, who are all very well in their way, but——"

Katherine smiled a little, rather scornfully.

"The royal and noble people cannot marry me by force, and I should suppose they will understand a plain 'No' if they don't often hear one. Besides, if I do what I meditate I shall soon lose all attraction for them."

"Good Lord, what's that? You alarm me. I remember you expressed very revolutionary ideas in India."

"I will tell you after dinner. You will dine with us, won't you, and stay a day or two?"

"I will dine with pleasure, and sleep the night. But I must be back in town by the first morning train. I have to go down to Windsor at noon. What on earth can you be thinking of doing? Buying a kingdom in the South Seas, or finishing the Panama?"

"Something that you will perhaps think quite as eccentric. Let us talk of other things. The day is a real English day to welcome you, so dim, so sad, so still; the weather you sigh for in India."

"Yes," said Framlingham, falling in with her mood. "One thinks of Lytton's verses:

"'Wandering lonely, over seas,
At shut of day, in unfamiliar land,
What time the serious light is on the leas,
To me there comes a sighing after ease
Much wanted, and an aching wish to stand
Knee-deep in English grass, and have at hand
A little churchyard cool, with native trees
And grassy mounds, thick laced with osier-bands,
Wherein to rest at last, nor farther stray.
So, sad of heart, muse I at shut of day,
On safe and quiet England, till thought ails
With inward groanings deep for meadows grey,
Grey copses, cool with twilight, shady dales,
Home-gardens, full of rest, where never may
Come loud intrusion, and what chiefly fails
My sick desire, old friendships fled away.
I am much vexed with loss. Kind Memory, lay
My head upon thy lap and tell me tales.'

"He was a very young man when he wrote these lines," said Framlingham, "and the only criticism I would offer, is, that I should prefer 'close' of day to 'shut' of day. What say you?"

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After dinner that evening, when Mrs. Massarene had retired to her room not to offend a governor, who was spoken of as a future governor-general, by the sight of her nodding and dozing, Katherine turned to her guest and said briefly—

"I will tell you now what my wishes are, and what my one doubt is."

"I am all attention," said Framlingham, lifting the sleepy Whisky on to his knee.

"I have found out," she continued, "that the money got together by my late father was nearly all gained in bad ways, cruel ways, dishonest ways."

"That does not surprise me," said Framlingham. "Most self-made men are made by questionable means. Go on."

"If he had his deserts he would have been spurned by everyone," said Katherine, whose voice shook and was very low. "I have reason to believe that the man who killed him had been cheated by him out of a tin mine. I traced that man. He was driven wild by want. His blood is on us and on the money."

"I thought no one knew who killed Massarene?"

"No one does know. I found letters. I traced their writer. There would be no use in publicity. His case was not worse than that of others. But he was miserable and alone. He took his revenge. At least I believe so. I have gone through all my father's documents, and ledgers, and records. His whole life was one course of selfish, merciless, unprincipled gain. His earlier economies were made out of the navvies, and miners, and squatters who frequented a low gambling den which he kept in what was then the small township of Kerosene. All his money is accursed. It is all blood-money. I cannot spend a sixpence of it without shame."

She spoke still in low tones and gently, but with intense though restrained feeling.

Framlingham scarcely knew what to say. He had no doubt that she was perfectly right as to the sources of her father's wealth, and he was sorry that she had been able to arrive at such knowledge.

"These are your views," he said as she paused. "Now let me hear your projects.'

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"They can be told in very few words," she replied. "I desire—I think I may say I intend to free myself of the whole burden of the inheritance. Alas! I cannot undo its curse."

"You mean to beggar yourself!" exclaimed her companion in amaze and consternation.

"If you call it so. I must leave my mother her yearly income which is given her under the will; but I can do as I please with all the rest, and I shall restore it as far as possible to those from whom he gained it. Of course few of his victims will be traceable; but some may be, so at all events the money shall go back to the poor from whom it was drained."

Framlingham stared at her in silent stupefaction.

"You cannot be serious," he said at last.

"I am sorry you look at it in that way. I thought I should have had your sympathy."

"My sympathy!"

"Certainly. You are a man of honor."

Framlingham was silent.

"Cannot you pity my dishonor?" she said in the same hushed, grave tones.

"My dear girl," said her friend, "I pity acutely what you feel, and I can imagine nothing more painful to a sensitive nature than such a discovery as you have made. But you may have exaggerated your censure and your conclusions. The age we live in is lenient to such deeds when they are successful. Your father was a rude man dwelling in rough society. You must not judge him by the standard of your own high ethics. As for what you propose to do, it is simply madness."

"I am sorry you take that view."

"How can I take any other? What man or woman of the world would take any other? You hold a magnificent position. You have the means of leading a life of extreme usefulness and beauty. You can marry and have children to whom your property can pass. If it has been defiled at its source, it will be purified in passing through your hands. Foul water going through a porcelain filter comes out clear. You are not responsible for what your father did. His crimes, if he committed any, lie buried

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with him. Neither God nor man can call you to account for them."

"I call myself."

"This is midsummer madness in midwinter! If you put your project into execution, you would be rooked, robbed, ruined on every side, and you would raise a hornet's nest of swindlers around you. No one would be grateful to you. All would turn you into ridicule and environ you with intrigue. My dear, you have had Aladdin's lamp given to you. For Heaven's sake use it for your own happiness and that of others. Do not break it because there is a flaw in the glass. There is your mother also to be considered," he added after a pause. "What right have you to cause her such change of circumstance, such possible mortification as your abandonment of your inheritance would bring with it?"

"In that perhaps you may be right," said Katherine wearily, "but in that only, and perhaps not even in that. You speak with the view of the world, and wisely no doubt. But I am sorry you see it so. I should have hoped you would have understood me better."

He strove to turn her and to argue with her for more than two hours, but he failed to bring home his own convictions to her mind.

"Marry, marry, marry!" he said. "It is the only cure for distempered dreams."

"I shall not marry," replied Katherine, "and I do not dream. What I have said to you are facts. What I mean to do is expiation."

Framlingham shook his head.

"When a woman is once started on the road of self-sacrifice, an eighty-horse power would not hold her back from pursuing it. Good-night, my dear."

He went up the staircase to his own room, and when there opened one of the windows and looked out; the night was dark, but he could hear the swell of the sea, and the homely smell of wet grass, of rotting leaves, of falling rain, was agreeable to him because it was that of the country of his birth.

"What she wants to do is really very fine and very honorable," he thought. "It is midsummer madness, but

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most honorable sentiments are. It is a pity that one's worldly wisdom obliges one to throw cold water on such a scheme."

The next morning, very early, he went back to town.

He left an additional sense of depression and uncertainty behind him in Katherine's mind. He had not altered her opinion, but he had increased her perplexities. If this was how a sagacious and experienced man of the world looked at her project, it was possible that there were obstacles in the way of its accomplishment which escaped her own sight. She had expected to have Framlingham's comprehension and concurrence, for in India he had felt so much sympathy with her revolt against her father's wealth. The worldly wisdom which he esteemed it his duty to preach chilled her with its egotism and its coldness. There was only one person living who would have understood her scruples and desires, and to that one person she would certainly never speak again.

There had been a wall between them before this mendacious report of which Framlingham had spoken; since that report there was an abyss. She felt that if she met Hurstmanceaux on a public road, they would by tacit mutual consent pass each other without visible recognition.

Had her mother not been living, she would have had no hesitation in going straight to the end she had in view. But her mother constituted a duty of another and opposite kind.

The rights of his wife had been almost entirely ignored by William Massarene; but her daughter could not ignore them morally, if the law would have allowed her (as it did) to do so legally. More than once she attempted to approach the subject, and was arrested by her own natural reserve, and by the slow comprehension to take a hint of her mother.

Moreover, the memory of William Massarene was quite different to what his presence had been to the wife, whom his last testament had insulted. With his coffin in the Roxhall crypt, all his offences had been buried in her eyes; a man to whose funeral princes had sent wreaths and a silver stick could not in her sight be other than

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assoilzied. Her heart was much warmer than her mind was strong, and she was accessible to those charms of social greatness to which her daughter was wholly invulnerable. She had suffered in the great world, but she had liked it.

"Would you mind being poor again?" Katherine asked her once, tentatively.

Margaret Massarene was unpleasantly startled.

"There aren't anything wrong about the money, is there?" she said anxiously. "I'm always afraid, now your dear father aren't here, to hold it all together."

"Oh, it is all solid enough!" replied Katherine, with some bitterness. "I merely asked you, would you dislike being poor if you were so?"

"Well, my dear," replied Mrs. Massarene, crossing her hands on her lap, "I can't say as I should like it. When I went over to Kilrathy I did wish as how I'd stayed milkin' all my days. But that's neither here nor there, and the past is spilled milk as nobody can lap up, not even a cat. But, to be honest with ye, I think there's a good deal of pleasantness about money, and living well, and being warm in winter and cool in summer, and seein' everybody hat in hand as 't were. No, my dear, I shouldn't like to be poor; and you wouldn't either, if you'd ever known what 't was."

Katherine was silent. She had not expected any other answer, yet she was disappointed.

"But," she said, after a few moments—"but, my dear mother, I think you know, I think you must know, that this vast amount of money and possessions which we inherit——"

"Which you inherit," said Mrs. Massarene with a little asperity. "I'm struck out——"

"You or I, it is the same thing," said Katherine. "You must know, I think, that—that—it was not very creditably gained. You must, I suppose, have known many things and many details of my father's life in Kerosene; of his early life, at any rate; of the foundations of his wealth."

"Perhaps I did and perhaps I didn't," said her mother rather sullenly. "Your good father never consulted me,

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my dear, and if I'd put myself forward he'd have locked me up in the coal cellar, and left me there."

"No doubt he never consulted you," said Katherine. "But it is impossible that living with him, and working for him as you have often told me you did, you can have been wholly ignorant of the beginning of his rise to wealth. You must know very much of the ways by which he first acquired it."

Her mother was moved by divided feelings, of which, however, vexation was the chief. She was embarrassed because she was a very honest woman; but at the same time her buried lord was purified and exalted in her eyes. Had not a bishop laid him in his grave?

"'Tis neither here nor there what I may have known, or leastways may have guessed," she said sullenly and with some offence. "Your father never did nothing as the police could have laid hold of—never!"

"Oh, mother!" cried Katherine. "Is that your standard of morality, of virtue?"

The indignation in her voice increased her mother's annoyance.

"I don't see, anyhow," she said very angrily, "that it is the place of a daughter to try and rake up things against her father. William was in a new country, where the morals is new, and maybe he did like his neighbors. But the first people in the old country thought much of him. He'd hev died a lord if he'd lived a year more. The Prince sent a wreath and a gentleman. When he's laid in his grave with all that pomp and honor, what for do you, his own child, go and try to throw mud on his coffin? I think it shame of you, Kathleen; and if that's all your fine eddication has taught you, well 'twas money ill spent, and you'd better look at the fifth commandment."

With a sigh her daughter rose and walked through the veranda into the gardens beyond, and thence into the pine-woods. She felt the utter impossibility of ever bringing her mother's mind into any unison with her own. It was wholly useless to attempt to reach and touch a chord which did not exist. If she pursued the course which she thought right, she must do so in spite of her mother, and alone in her choice.

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Margaret Massarene loved her daughter, but she thought Katherine was a "crank." She could see no reason why they should not both of them enjoy the good things poor William had left behind him.

She was a good and honest woman; but in Kerosene City the moral feelings lose their sensitiveness, and she could not follow Katherine's reasonings; she considered them high-flown, and a pack of nonsense. "As for fortunes being made honest," said Margaret Massarene to herself, "'tis a pack of stuff to dream of it. You can't no more make a big fortune with clean hands than you can stack a dung heap."

But when the fortune, however accumulated, was made, it seemed to her flying in the face of an all-seeing Providence to quarrel with it, and to "climb down." Who ever did climb down if they could help it?

"You would not like to visit America, mother?" Katherine said to her a few days later.

Margaret Massarene gasped.

"America? The States?"

"The States, yes—Dakota."

"Ropes shouldn't drag me," replied her mother with unusual firmness. "Oh, Lord! The food served all higgledy-piggledy, sour and sweet all running a-muck; the trains a-peering in at your sixth floor window; the men hanging on to hooks in the crowd of the cars; the spittle all over the place; the rush and the crush and the pother never still. Go back there? No; you should kill me first!"

She was roused to unusual self-assertion and emphasis.

"Only for a visit," said Katherine timidly.

"And what for—for a visit?" repeated Mrs. Massarene. "Now I've got back, I'll stay where I am. Many and many a night I've lain awake in that hell; for hell 't is, with the railways a-shrieking and rumbling past the windows, and the furnace chimneys a-bellowing fire and smoke, and the whistles a-screaming, and the pistons a-thumping; and I've thought of the old home and cried till I was blind, and said to myself, if ever a good God let me go back, I'd stay at home if I swept the streets for a living. *I* don't fly in the face of Providence, Katherine."

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"But your home was in Ulster!"

"You don't want to be throwing that in my teeth. I wasn't brought up a fine English lady like you. But Europe's Europe and the States is the States; and I won't cross that grey, wild water again; no, not if you kill me!"

"Of course, my dear mother, you shall do as you wish."

"Oh, you're very soft spoken, but you're that obstinate! What do you want with the States? You're so mighty pitiful of the poor—almost a socialist, as one may say. Well, I can tell you there's harder lines there between rich and poor than there is in these old countries, and more hatred too. There aren't nowhere," continued Margaret Massarene, her pale face growing warm, "where the luxury's more overdone, and the selfishness crueller, and the spending of money wickeder, than in the States. Nowhere on earth where the black man is loathed and the poor white is scorned as they are in that canting 'free' country!"

Katherine sighed.

"So I have always understood. But it only makes it a greater duty."

"What a greater duty?"

Katherine hesitated.

"To go there. To see for oneself. To try and restore what one can."

"Duty never lies at home, my dear, we know," said Mrs. Massarene with sarcastic acerbity. "I suppose you'll write to me once a month; and if anything happens to me while you're away, you'll give orders as they'll lay me by your poor dear father, whom you're ashamed on."

Her daughter felt that her path of duty, whether at home or abroad, was one which it was not easy to discern in the gloaming of a finite humanity, through the tangled brush-wood of conflicting demands and principles.

"Won't you, can't you understand, mother?" she said, with a wistful supplication in her voice.

"No," replied her mother sternly. "I could hev understood if you'd held your head high, and married high, and had a lot of nice little children; but a freak as will

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make you the laughing-stock of all the respectable newspapers on this side and the other, I don't understand and don't want to understand; and 'tis an insult to poor William in his grave."

"I'm not speaking for myself, my dear," she added; "it's very good of you not to hev put me in the workhouse."

Katherine felt that, though duty may be bracing and fortifying, it strongly resembles a cold salt bath when the thermometer is below zero.

She spent many solitary hours walking in the little wood which led to the sea, or sitting where she had sat with Framlingham, thinking over the immense task which lay before her, and wondering how it was best to execute it. She searched her heart relentlessly for any selfish or unworthy motive which might lurk in it. All alone under the pine trees as she was, she felt herself flush with consciousness as she asked herself: was she moved by any personal desire? She felt that she would be glad to vindicate herself in the eyes of Hurstmanceaux—to force him to acknowledge that one basely born might act well and with honor. She longed to show him that she could shake off the ill-gotten wealth which he despised and which the world adored. Something of this might move her—so much her conscience compelled her to admit—but with perfect honesty she could also feel that, had she never seen him, she would none the less have desired to undo, as far as should be in her power, the evil which her father had done to the poor and helpless.

Again, was she wronging her mother? Was she leaving the real duty, which lay close at hand, for the imaginary duty, which lay far away? She knew that many a dreamer did so; that many an enthusiast left his own garden to weed and drought, whilst he went to sow in strange lands. She held in horror the religion which taught that the soul should be saved, however the hearth and home were deserted.

These days of indecision and mental conflict were days of infinite pain, for her own nature was resolute and not wavering, and to such a temper irresolution seems a form of cowardice. Moreover she, who had read widely and

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thought deeply, knew that it is easier to move the mountains or to arrest the tides than it is to do any real good to the mass of mankind. She had none of the illusions of the socialist, none of the distorted idealism of revolutionists and philanthropists; she was not sustained by any erroneous idolatry of humanity; she did not expect the seed she would sow to bring forth any fruit which would change the face of Nature; but the impulse to cast from her the wealth acquired by fraud, by violence, and by usury, was too strong in her for her to be able to resist it.

She knew that what she wished to do was fraught with innumerable difficulties, and that might, unless well done, cause more evil than good. She had hoped to find in Framlingham some guidance, some help; but she saw that she must rely on no one but herself. It saddened her to know that it was so, but it did not entirely discourage her. Conscience is a lamp which burns low in the press of the world, but lights clearly enough the path of the solitary.

In the autumn of that year, sixteen months after the death of William Massarene, she sailed from Southampton for that dread Northwest, which remained in the memories of her earliest childhood as a place of horror, whose summer meant sandstorms, and drought, and sunstroke, and the whirling of the mad tornado, and the scorching billows of the forest fires, and winter meant the pall of snow on hill and plain, the driving of the dreadful blizzard, the lowing of starved cattle, the mourning of famished wolves, the shapeless heaps upon the ice which were the bodies of frozen travelers and foundered caravans.

It was terrible to her to return there, and behold all which she must see there; but it was more terrible to her to remain possessor of the millions which had been acquired in that hell.

"Why can that young woman be gone to America?" said Daddy Gwyllian.

"Gone to look after her property, I presume," said Hurstmanceaux, whom he addressed.

"It is a *joli denier* to look after. That cad was second only to Vanderbilt and Pullman."

"Why will you always talk about money, Daddy? It is a very vulgar habit."

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"Money's like robust health," said Daddy. "Vulgar if you like, but deuced comfortable to those who have got it."

Hurstmanceaux, as he walked down Pall Mall a few moments later, felt irrationally disappointed that she had gone to America. No doubt she had gone to look after her property there, but he did not think that the person he had seen, with her large, dark, calm eyes and her stately grace, ought to care whether those millions of acres and billions of dollars diminished or increased. If her attitude and expressions in his presence had been real, and not affected, she could not care. He regretted that he had written that letter to her from Cowes. It had been written from his heart on a generous impulse; and he knew life well enough to know that our generous impulses are the costliest of all our indulgences.

When he thought also of all which she might know—which she certainly must suspect—of the sister whom he had loved so well, he suffered as only a man of tender heart and sensitive honor can suffer when wounded in his family pride and his natural affections.

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CHAPTER XXXVII.

WITH the following March London saw once more the Duchess of Otterbourne carrying her graceful presence to Court and salon and theatre, having recovered her beauty and with it her spirits. One of those fortunate incidents of which life is prodigal to its favorites had happened. An old aunt had died and left her a legacy of a few thousands; enough thousands to make a year at least pass smoothly, without too much self-denial.

She was pleased to have a little ready money, indisputably her own, which had come to her in a most respectable manner, and could be squandered just as she chose, without the interference of anybody. Millions do not really afford you the smallest satisfaction if somebody stands over you to see how you spend them.

The insolence and the courage of her character brought her back to the scene of her slavery to William Massarene. She felt that it was necessary to show her brother that she did not care a straw for his condemnation, and to prove to society in general that her position was unshaken. Who could tell how that young woman, who had sent her the counterfoils and the acceptances, might not have talked? Besides, she wished to see her children. Her affection for them was genuine. It was not profound or unselfish, it was not tender or ideal, but it was a real affection in its way; and, besides, she was proud of them. They were the handsomest little people in England; always well and always strong. Against Jack she bore a grudge—unreasoningly and unkindly—but still, she wished to have him with her in London. The presence of the little duke and his brothers and sister in her new house would prove to people that her conduct had always been perfectly correct.

"One does miss one's children so cruelly," she said to her sister Carrie, who answered: "Yes, one does; it is like losing one's dressing-bag."

She fully expected Hurstmanceaux to forbid their coming to her, but he left the matter to the Ormes's decision;

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he was at Faldon, and gave no opinion one way or the other. To her intimate friends she attributed her rupture with him to his extreme severity and unkindness about the Otterbourne diamonds and her own financial affairs; and, as she was always a popular person, and he never was, her version was accepted and circulated, and the opinion of the world was indulgent to her.

She took a pretty, furnished house in Eaton Place, and resumed the life which she had led when Cocky, like a ministering angel, had been behind her, to excuse her imprudence and share her extravagance. The Blenheims were left down at Whiteleaf, but Jack and his brothers and sister were brought to town.

Boo, wild with delight, raced upstairs to a bedroom on the third floor, and thought that altitude a seventh heaven. Jack was dull; he loved the country and hated London, hated it doubly now that he had lost Harry, and he felt sure that his mother was the cause of Harry's disappearance. When he saw the Life Guards ride down through the Park to Knightsbridge, the sight made him very sad, for there were no kind dark eyes looking at him with a smile in them from under the shining helmet.

His mother, who was not harassed by such regrets, was very pleased to be in London again with a little money at her back. She was very tenacious of her social position, and she knew that it was necessary to be respectable now and then. She attended the first Drawing-room; went to the first receptions of some tiresome *gros bonnets* whom she called old dowdies; and reascended a social throne which for a moment had shaken under her. The Chapel Royal saw her every Sunday, and she began to think of making a pleasant second marriage before Katherine Massarene (who might spoil one) should return to society.

Harrenden House was shut up; its porter alone, stripped of his gorgeous vestments, dwelt behind the gates looking no more like himself than a grub looks like a butterfly. There was a hatchment above the door, large, imposing, majestic; it was there by Margaret Massarene's wish beyond the usual time to have it shown. All the great people and the smart people who had dined at that house, and pocketed cotillon presents, and drunk rare wines, and

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borrowed money and paid it by insolent jokes, now drove past in the sunshine or the fog, in the north wind or the east, had found other dupes and other butts for their needs and their jests, and did not even give a thought to "Billy."

He was gone, and there were always new people coming in from the States or the Colonies, or even homemade, who were the natural manure wherewith to nourish starving genealogical trees.

"I say, Sourisette, how was it you got nothing under Billy's will?" said her cousin Roxhall to her one day as they rode in the Park.

"My dear Gerald," she answered with dignity, "*I* had not sold him an ancestral estate. If I had done so I should not have taken it back as a gift from his daughter as you have done!"

"Oh I say," muttered Roxhall. "That's a nasty one, but it isn't the fact. I've paid back half the purchase price and the other half is on the land, and it's not you, Mousie, who have the right to say such things."

Roxhall's mind reverted to the sale of Vale Royal at Homburg, when he had never looked too closely into the percentage received by the fair negotiatress of the sale. They were speaking as they rode down Rotten Row, and at that moment her mare became fidgety and carried her out of earshot. He rode after her.

"You think you can say those things to me," he said, leaning a little toward her, "because I am a relative, and because I have always been a fool about you; but don't you put people's backs up like that, my dear, or you'll get more than you like some day."

"My dear Gerald," said Mouse between her teeth, "fall back a little, please; I don't care to be seen riding with a person who has taken alms from Miss Massarene, even if he *is* my cousin."

She was not afraid to be insolent to him; Roxhall would be no use any more to her, for he could never sell Vale Royal twice.

Roxhall checked his horse and let her groom pass him. This was the woman for whom he had nearly broken his wife's heart, and more than nearly ruined himself!

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"What a confounded ass I was!" he thought. "She isn't worth the tan that her mare kicks up; and yet—and yet—oh, Lord, if she whistled me I should run to her like a dog, I know I should!"

He was a clever if careless man of the world, and he was sincerely attached to his wife, but he had been as wax in the hands of his cousin Mouse, and would be so again, he felt, if she cared to make him so. Neither philosophy nor psychology can explain fascination or the power it exercises in the teeth of common sense and to the root of conscience.

She, who believed and disbelieved in a Higher Power, as most people do according to the favor or the frown which they consider the Higher Power gives them, was at this moment in the full fervor of belief, as she had money enough to let her do as she liked for a year or two. Roxhall could not touch her conscience; Hurstmanceaux could not rouse her shame; the sight of the closed gates of Harrenden House could not disturb that serenity which she had regained so successfully; but something did occur which momentarily disturbed and almost afflicted her.

Jack had been usually kept down at Whiteleaf with his brothers; and a remote Northamptonshire country house amongst farmsteads, streams, and orchards, is not a centre of news. No word or sign had come to him of his friend, and in his occasional visits to town he had heard nothing of him. Though years had passed since Harry had bade him good-bye under the elm-tree, and children are usually forgetful, with little minds like sieves, Jack did not cease to lament his lost friend. If he had been sure where Harry had gone, he would have tried to get on board a ship and work his way out to the same place, like the cabin-boys he read of in story-books. But the South Pole was a vague destination; and he once heard some men saying, who had been Harry's friends, that he was now in Uganda or Rhodesia. It was all so vague that it was impossible to plan any wanderings and voyages on such data.

Mammy must know, he thought; but he could not bring himself to ask her. He had a vague but positive sense that Harry's exile and disappearance were due to her; that she

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had been unkind and had hurt Harry in some way or another in some incurable and unmerciful manner.

When Jack saw all the London life going on just the same—the Life Guards prancing, the ladies cycling or riding, the traffic filling up the streets, the carriages flashing toward the Park—his young heart ached with a dull painful sense of the heartlessness of things. Harry had always been there in that movement and glitter and rush; and now he was no more seen, and no one cared, not even his troop. Once he went up to Harry's late colonel, whom he knew by sight, and asked straight out for news of him. The colonel looked surprised, for a long time had elapsed. "My dear boy, I don't know at all where he is; he's gone on the make somewhere, I believe. Out of sight, out of mind, you know, more shame for us."

What unkind, indifferent people they all were, thought Jack.

But in the middle of June, when he was on his visit to his mother, there was a telegram in a morning paper which disinterred the buried name so dear to him. It said, in the usual niggard brevity, "Lord Brancepeth said to have been severely wounded fighting in Loomalia."

Now Harry's late colonel was startled by that telegram as he sat at luncheon in his club; and as he walked an hour later across the Green Park he chanced to meet Jack and his tutor.

"Look here, my boy," he said, holding out the newspaper. "You asked me once about this friend of yours—"

Jack read the two lines through starting tears.

"Thanks very much," he said in a low tone, and took off his hat to the colonel; then he said to Mr. Lane, "If you please, we will go home."

"That child's a good plucked one," thought the colonel. "It's hit him hard."

By that time many people in fashionable London had read the telegram, and were talking of it.

"Who is this gentleman about whom you are so unhappy?" asked his tutor, who knew nothing of fashionable society and its rumors and traditions.

Jack felt himself color. He could not have exactly analyzed what he felt.

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"He's Harry," he said in a low tone. "He was always very kind to us; kinder than anyone."

The Colonial Office was applied to for information, and the Minister for the Colonies buttonholed in the Lobby. The Minister was chill and careful; he remarked that Lord Brancepeth was acting as an amateur, on his own responsibility—entirely on his own responsibility; he could not approve his action; the Loomalis were in insurrection; the Boers were the the allies of England; there were treaties; treaties must be respected, however individuals might suffer; the Government could not be responsible for any adventurous gentleman fighting on his own hand.

A similar answer was returned to Lord Inversay when he, a weary and infirm old man, came up to town, and went to the Colonial Office and to the Premier.

A little later, fuller particulars were telegraphed from the newspaper correspondents at Capetown, and then everybody began again to talk of Harry at the dinner-tables, and club-houses, and pleasure places in which he had been once such a familiar figure.

The Boers had, as usual, made an excuse of an imaginary transgression of boundary, to attack a friendly tribe, of which they were bound to respect the neutrality. They had harried and ravaged the country, carried off herds and flocks, burned villages, and borne off to servitude old men, women and children, with all those excesses of barbarous brutality which invariably characterize the introduction of civilization anywhere. This especial tribe was blameless, willing to be at peace, and contented to live in a simple and natural manner with the harvests of a bountiful soil. But that soil their neighbors wanted; it is the story of every war.

Brancepeth had gone as a traveler, only to look on; but he was soon disgusted by the cruelty of the white men, touched by the helplessness of the natives, alienated by the avarice and violence of the former, and moved by the rights and sufferings of the latter. He had gone with no intention of taking a share in the strife; but when he saw the flaming kraals, the ravaged flocks, the fettered women, the starved and hunted old people and young

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children, the blood of a soldier grew hot in him; the sense of justice uprose in him; the generosity of a manly temper impelled him to take part with the weak, the oppressed, the natural owners of the vast plains, the solemn mountains, the trackless hills, the immense waters. He drew his sword on their side. He led them more than once to victory. If he had had a single troop of the men he had commanded at home, he would have driven the Dutchmen back over their own veldt, and forced them to relinquish their prey. But the poor Loomalis had been already exhausted, demoralized, hopelessly weakened, when he had first come into their land. They could not second his efforts or comprehend his tactics. Had he arrived a month earlier, he might perhaps have saved them. As it was, he could only die with them.

He had fought side by side with their chief, Mahembele, hewing down the Boers with a sabre when the last shots had been fired from his revolver, and not a single cartridge had been left.

"It is not your cause; go, while you have life," said the African to him.

"I'll be damned if I will," said Brancepeth. "Right is right, and the right is on your side."

So he fought like a knight of old, knee-deep in the heap of dead he had slain, and he fell at last as the sun went down, pierced by a score of wounds, and Mahembele dropped, shot through the forehead, across his body.

The Boers retreated down the hillside—for he had mauled them terribly—and a few of the Loomalis ventured to carry off the body of their chief for burial; and as they removed it, they saw that the white leader was not dead quite, and in gratitude they bore him away to a cavern in the rocks, where their women tended him, until months afterwards some English travelers, hearing of his deeds and of his fate, sought him out, and had him carried down the river to their camp, many miles away. Thus it became known who he was, and how he had given away his life for these poor and persecuted people.

The story moved his own London world when it was told in the columns of the great daily papers. Poor

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Harry! He had lived like a fool, but he had ended his life like a hero.

For ended it surely was; he might rally, he might even live through a few months, a few years, but he had been shot and slashed like a desert animal slaughtered and maimed by a hundred hands; he would never breathe without pain, never move without help, never stand upright again. So the surgeon who was with him telegraphed to his father; and the Governor at Capetown to the Government at home.

And for ten minutes, in guardroom, in clubroom, in drawing-room, his old friends were sorry and spoke of him in a hushed voice. Only the Colonial Office was annoyed, because it had been pledged to protect the Loomalis and had broken its word, and failed them in their need; and the fact that one English gentleman had stood by these poor Africans to the last disagreeably emphasized by contrast the bad faith and pusillanimity of England as an empire.

The Duchess of Otterbourne, like the Colonial Office, was much shocked and displeased. It was odious to have all London talking of Harry; it would, she knew, make people remember his relations with herself.

When a woman has ordered a man out of her life she prefers him to efface himself from other people's lives. Harry had effaced himself and gone docily into oblivion, which was quite right, but that now from that nether world he should have sent a clarion blast echoing over the seas, as if he were one of Wagner's heroes, was distinctly irritating. Do what she would, too, she could often not sleep for thinking of him with his body hacked to pieces and his blood staining the yellow grass. To be sure she could take chloral, but she was very prudent as regarded health, and she knew that chloral has two faces, one beneficient and the other malevolent, and is not a deity to be too frequently invoked.

Meantime he was coming home; every day the vessel drew nearer and nearer, whether it brought him living or brought him dead. It was too dreadfully irritating when she had been relieved from the incubus of William Massarene to have this revival of an old scandal.

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If his mother had said a word to her eldest son about their old friend, he would have laid his head on her lap and sobbed his heart out, and asked her why she had sent him to Africa. But she said not a word. He saw her always going out here, there, and everywhere, beautifully dressed and gay and bright; and Jack hated her for her heartlessness and avoided her, which was easy to do, for she seldom asked for him. Boo she had frequently with her, and his little brothers were sometimes taken in her carriage; but for Jack she scarcely ever inquired. He was left to the care of Mr. Lane. Once she told him to go as a page to a cousin's wedding, the daughter of Mrs. Cecil Courcy, and Jack bluntly refused.

"I won't be dressed up like a boy in a pantomime," he said to Boo, who brought him the order; and he was steadfast in his refusal, for how could he know that Harry might not be already dead?

"You'd get a diamond pin," said Boo.

"What do I want with pins?" replied Jack with scorn. "I won't be made a guy of; I'd sooner be a *real* page and help to clean the plate."

"You are such a low boy, Jack," said Boo with disdain. "Mammy always says so."

Jack's brows clouded at his mother's name. Was he a low boy? he wondered. He did not think so, but then his tutor had told him that no one has any knowledge of themselves. He liked real things, he liked people who told the truth; he hated being called "your Grace"; he loved dogs and horses; he detested fine ladies and all their perfumes and pranks and pastimes; perhaps he was a very low boy indeed.

Jack, after the colonel had shown him that telegram, bought up all the newspapers he could (when he was not watched), and read them with difficulty where the words were long, and understood that his friend had been behaving like a knight of old. How his heart ached, and how his blood thrilled! One thing too added greatly to his pain; the news was more than four months old. Intelligence traveled slowly from the land of the Loomalis, and people did so also. He could not tell at all how his friend was on these especial days when he, himself seated on his own

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bed to be undisturbed, devoured the chronicles from Cape-town in one London journal after another. Jack had heard enough about wounds from shot and sabre to know that they were often mortal, and that recovery, if it ensued, was terribly tedious and slow, and often too uncertain.

In his ignorance and unhappiness he took a bold step. He wrote to Harry's father, whom he did not know. He composed a letter "all out of his own head."

"*The Duke of Otterbourne presents his compliments to Lord Inversay and wishes very much if you would tell him where Harry is, and if it is true that he is hurt amongst blackmen. I am so very very anxious, and I want you please to tell me, and no one knows that the Duke of Otterbourne is writing to you, so please don't say, and excuse these blots; please answer soon, and I am your very affectionate Jack.*"

When he had read it over it seemed to him not altogether right; he was afraid it was ungrammatical, but he could not tell where the mistakes were, and he put it in an envelope and addressed it to the Marquis of Inversay, looking out the address in the big red book so dear to Mrs. Massarene, and sealing it with a seal lent him by his friend Hannah, bearing the device of two doves and a rose.

The little note would have gone to the heart of Harry's father, and would have certainly been answered, but, as Jack's unlucky star would have it, his mother espied his letter lying on the hall table with her own, and seeing the address in the big childish caligraphy, took it, opened it, and consigned it in atoms to the waste-paper basket.

She was agitated and irritated in an extreme degree by its perusal. What would old Inversay think if he got such a note? He would actually think that Jack *knew!* She was beyond measure annoyed and alarmed to see this impudent little fellow daring to act and to write all by himself.

In her own way she was herself worried about Harry, although she concealed her worry successfully; it pained her to think of his wounds and his danger; her anxiety

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did not prevent her from going to theatres and operas, and pastoral plays and dinner parties, and State concerts and all the rest of it; but still the thought of him hurt her, and no doubt he would come home and be made a pet of by everybody, and be sent for to Windsor, and it would all be rather worrying, and *malapropos*, and perhaps some woman would get hold of him—women are always mad about heroes—and then that woman would make him talk of herself.

She said nothing about his letter to Jack, who, after watching with eagerness for the post in vain for a week, sadly decided that Lord Inversay must have been offended with a stranger for writing to him. He did not say anything about his disappointment to anyone, for Jack had already learned that our sorrows only bore other people. But he got all the newspapers he could and searched through them every day. Once he saw that Lord Brancepeth had been brought down from the interior, and had been carried on board a homeward-bound steamer at Capetown, and although very weak and shattered, it was considered possible the voyage might save him, and that he might rally on reaching his native air.

Through all those weeks of uncertainty Jack was perpetually punished by Mr. Lane for inattention, for disobedience, for neglected tasks, for unlearnt lessons, for bad spelling, for saying that two and three made seven, and that Caractacus was Julius Cæsar's brother. The child's thoughts were far away on the big green rollers of the ocean on which the vessel which bore his friend homeward was rocking and panting. What sort of weather was it? were the winds kind and the waves gentle? were the hot calms he had read of very trying? did Harry suffer when the ship pitched? Those were the questions he was always asking himself, and to which he could have no answer; and he began to grow thin and pale and seemed a hopelessly naughty and unteachable little boy to Mr. Lane, who could beat nothing whatever into his head, and who, being a very conscientious person, wrote to Hurstmanceaux that he feared he should be obliged to relinquish his charge.

"Don't encourage the duke in his fancies for Africa,

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Mr. Lane, or we shall have him Africa mad like them all, and running off to Cecil Rhodes," his mother said once jestingly to his tutor; and although that gentleman was not used to smart ladies and their way of talking *au bout des levres*, he understood that the subject of the Black Continent was disagreeable to her. But the time came when she was forced to think about Africa herself.

One day, rather early in the forenoon, when she was alone, they brought in to her the card of Lord Inversay. She was extremely astonished and somewhat embarrassed. Harry's father had never set foot in her house—she did not even know him to speak to; he had always obstinately avoided both her and her husband; he was poor and unfashionable, a man seldom seen in the smart world, and who lived almost all the year round on his estates on the Border.

For the moment she was inclined not to receive him, then curiosity conquered the vague apprehension which moved her. Moreover, she recollected with a chill that the newspapers had spoken of Harry as returning home; was it possible that he had sent her a message?

Inversay entered her presence without ceremony; he was a weary-looking man about sixty, and the expression of his face was cold and greatly troubled; he declined with a gesture her invitation to a seat beside her, and continued standing. She looked at him with the sense of apprehension weighing more heavily upon her.

"To what am I indebted?" she began.

"Madam," said Inversay very coldly, though his voice was husky and almost inaudible, "I bring you a request from my son; he has come home to die."

"To die? Harry?"

She grew very pale; there were genuine horror and emotion in the cry, if there was also some personal terror of a baser kind; dying men are so garrulous sometimes!

She was not unprepared for such a statement, but its clear and hard expression, as of an unalterable fact, gave her a great shock.

Poor silly Harry!

"Madam," said his father, "you may be quite sure that nothing short of the greatest extremity would have

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brought me to your house. He is dying, I repeat. I doubt if he can live an hour longer; that he can live a day is impossible."

"How very horrible!" she said nervously; she trembled visibly, she felt that Inversary intended to insult her, and she had not courage to resent and reprove it. Harry dying! Such a possibility had presented itself to her, and she had thoughts, even when she had read in the papers that he was coming home wounded, that perhaps he would be better—safer—dead; but now that the actual tragedy of his end was brought home to her, it seemed to her extremely dreadful.

Poor Harry!

He was only a year older than herself!

Inversay looked at her with loathing and hatred. But for her what a happy and simple life his boy might have led!

"I have a favor from you to ask for in his name," he said huskily; "nothing less could have made me leave him. But he cannot die in peace if he cannot see your son, the eldest boy; he would like to see all the children."

She checked the nervous tremor in her limbs and braved herself to combat and composure; she felt all that the stern eyes of the old man said to her while his lips limited themselves to those few harmless words.

"He was always very fond of the children," she said quite naturally, with marvellous self-possession. "But I don't think I can send them to see him; it would look so very odd; and a deathbed frightens small boys so much; Jack was ill for weeks after seeing his father die."

This tremendous falsehood glided smoothly off her lips in the purposed introduction of her husband's name.

Inversay moved a step nearer to her, and the scathing scorn of his gaze would have struck to the earth a woman less sure of herself, less safe in the surety of duplicity, less confident in the silence of the dying man who had her reputation in his hands.

"Madam," he said with a bitter scorn and wrath unspoken, "my son may breathe his last whilst you make me dawdle here. Let your eldest boy come with me at once—at once—do you hear?"

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"Lord Brancepeth was very fond of all children," she said again, a little nervously, "but it will seem very odd to people——"

"He loved *yours*, madam," said Inversay curtly; the three words cut her pride like a sword; seemed to bear down through all her hypocrisies and falsehoods and devices as she had seen the sabres of Harry's troopers cut through a veil of gauze and sever a lemon in two.

"Send for your son," he said with stern passion. "Send at once, madam; do you hear me?"

She was awed, and quailed under his fixed gaze. She did not dare to refuse his command, strange as the thing would look. She rang, and to the servant who entered said:

"Tell Mr. Lane to come to me, and to bring his Grace."

A moment or two later the tutor came into the room, and Jack also.

"Jack, you are to go with this gentleman where he wishes to take you. Mr. Lane, will you be so good as to accompany the duke and bring him home?"

"Where are we going to?" asked Jack, as they went downstairs; he did not know who Lord Iversay was, but he was a little afraid of the strained stern look on the old man's face; he felt that he was in the presence of some great grief, and his thoughts flew to Harry, vaguely hoping and fearing he knew not what.

"You will soon know," said Inversay, whose voice was choked in his throat as he looked at the handsome child with the soft black eyes, so like the eyes of another boy of the same age who, twenty years or so before this day, had run beside him over the sunny lawns of his old home; the old home was mortgaged to its last sod, and the boy had come home in the flower of his manhood to die—ruined by a woman.

They were driven quickly to the door of a well-known hotel; Inversay begged the tutor to wait below in the reading-room, and went alone upstairs with Jack, who caught his breath and felt his heart quake a little.

A vague terror had seized him; he recalled all the papers had said of the fighting in Loomalia.

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Was it, perhaps——? The child's warm blood turned cold.

Before the closed door of a bedroom Inversay paused.

"It is someone you like who is very ill," he said in a broken voice. "Don't be frightened and don't cry out, for heaven's sake."

He opened the door and motioned to the boy to precede him and enter.

There were two bay windows in the chamber, they were open, and the light shone on to the bed where an emaciated form was lying, a hand wasted and bony lay on the coverlid, a face, which had a ghastly beauty in it, was like marble on the snow of the pillows; some women, his mother and sisters, were kneeling beside the bed.

"Harry!" cried the child with a shrill scream, and swift as the wind he sprang across the room and leaped on the bed and covered the cold still face with kisses.

"Oh, Harry, Harry, wake up!" he sobbed. "Oh, speak to me, Harry. Look at me. It's Jack, it's Jack, that's here!"

His voice found its way to the fading memories of the dying man; Harry's closed eyes opened and smiled at him.

"You dear little beggar!" he murmured. "How you're grown! I'm glad——"

His strengthless hands tried to clasp the child and draw him closer.

"I've left you Cuckoopint, Jack," he said faintly. "Don't forget—what I told you—in the Park. Try and grow like your uncle Ronnie. He'll help you to keep straight."

His voice was scarce louder than a breath; his feeble heart was straining to force the blood through its vessels, the tired eyelids fell, and closed once more.

They gave him oxygen and he revived slightly, enough to know that Jack's head was lying on the pillow by his own and that Jack's arm was round his throat.

"Don't cry," he murmured. "Kiss the others for me. They never cared as you did."

There was a long silence, only broken by the passionate sobbing of the child and the subdued weeping of those present.

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"Keep clear of women, Jack," he said huskily, painfully, as he tried to draw the boy still closer. "Tell your mother—no—never mind. Thank her for letting you come. Where are you, dear? I can't see you. Kiss me again."

Then his mouth opened, gasping, and his last breath passed out into the summer air.

He had died, silent, as a gentleman must.

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CHAPTER XXXVIII.

When Jack entered his mother's house that afternoon he looked as if he had left boyhood behind him for ever. His face was drawn and pinched, his eyes were swollen with weeping, his rosy mouth was pale and compressed.

"His Grace is to go to the duchess at once, and alone, if you please, sir," said one of the servants.

"Go upstairs to your mother," said Mr. Lane to the child.

But Jack stood irresolute, his hands clenched involuntarily, his breath was uneven.

"Go," repeated his tutor.

Jack obeyed, and mounted the staircase with slow, unwilling steps; his heart was aching as it had never ached in his life.

"It's hit him hard, hasn't it, sir?" said the servant to the tutor, and smiled a discreet but eloquent smile.

Mr. Lane seemed not to hear, and went into the study; the boy passed out of sight amongst the heaths and poinsettias on the staircase, a stray pale London sunbeam following his golden head. His mother was alone.

She was seated at the other end of the room with her back to the little light there was. She looked haggard and apprehensive.

"Is he dead?" she said in a low, awed tone; she knew he was by the face of her little son. "Is he dead, dear?"

Jack looked at her in silence; his eyes had a seriousness in them which was rather a man's than a child's, stern, scornful, reproachful.

"Jack, don't stare like that! Speak to me! Is Harry dead?"

As she spoke she crossed the distance between them and tried to take the child in her embrace; she was alarmed and nervous. What had the dying man said?

Jack recoiled from her outstretched arms and continued to look at her with the gaze she sought to evade.

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His expression terrified her extremely; what could the boy know that he was old enough to understand?

"Jack, darling, speak to me," she said faintly.

"I—I—don't know much," said the child slowly in a voice which seemed no more his own. "I don't—know—much; but I think you are a wicked, wicked, wicked woman. And you killed him."

Then, without waiting for any answer or remonstrance, Jack turned his back on her and went slowly to the door.

His mother was agitated beyond expression; she was for the moment paralyzed and could think of nothing which she could do or say. She let her son pass out of the room without censure or inquiry or punishment. She threw herself down upon the cushions of a couch and wept.

Her sorrow was real for the moment. As far as she had ever really cared for any one in a sense of tenderness, she had loved Harry. But it was not long before her grief gave way to violent indignation. How ungenerous, how ungentlemanlike, it had been of him to speak ill of her to her child!

She had no doubt that he had done so, for it never occurred to her that Jack's active mind had unaided arrived at its just estimate of herself, and that the instincts of the boy had made him see in her the true assassin of his dear dead friend.

The bitterness of her anger dried the well springs of her grief. When she felt herself injured, she always thought that the whole world should rise up and do battle for her. For a man base enough to set her son against her there could be no occasion to mourn; especially when to mourn would compromise her before others. She had no anxiety about what correspondence Harry might have left behind him, for when he had gone to Africa he had sent her all her letters and other mementoes. She ordered her carriage and drove into the Park as usual; then she dined early at a club with some friends, and did a theatre, and went afterward with a merry party to supper at the Papillons Club.

That is how Helen mourns for Paris nowadays.

The obligation to laugh a little louder than usual for fear people should suppose you are sorry; a little shiver of

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regret when you are coming home alone in your brougham; a few drops more chloral than usual when you do get home—these are the only sacrifices that need to be made on the funeral pyre of the lover of to-day.

Jack did not sleep all night. He had sobbed himself into a heavy, agitated slumber as the day dawned, and his tutor had given orders that he should not be disturbed. When he had risen, had bathed, and been dressed, it was eleven o'clock in the forenoon, and he slipped out of sight of his servant, and instead of going to breakfast with Mr. Lane ran out of the house and came to seek his uncle Ronald, who happened to be in town on business; he was seldom in town for anything else. As Hurstmanceaux opened the hall door of his rooms to go down into the street, he saw with surprise the figure of a boy in sailor clothes standing on the head of the stairs.

"Is that you, Jack?" he said, recognizing his nephew. "You don't look well. Is anything the matter?"

"May I speak to you?" said Jack, standing on the threshold with his sailor hat in his hand.

"Certainly—come in," replied Hurstmanceaux, surprised to see the boy unaccompanied. "Are you alone?"

"Yes," said Jack; and he came and stood before his uncle; his face was grave, his eyes had dark circles under them; he looked very still, pale, and spiritless.

"Harry is dead," he said heavily, with a strange hopeless tone in his voice.

"I have heard so," replied Ronald, coldly and unfeelingly, as he felt. "Is that what you have come to say?"

"No," said Jack. "I have come to tell you I will not live with my mother any longer."

It was the first time he had called her formally mother. Hurstmanceaux looked at him in great surprise.

"That is a very grave statement," he said at last. "Don't you know that you have no will of your own? You are a minor."

Jack was silent, but his face grew very resolute; his uncle saw that he was in earnest.

"You wish to live no longer with your mother?" said Ronald slowly. "May I ask your reasons?"

"I shall not tell my reasons," said Jack haughtily,

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with the color coming back into his face, hotly and painfully.

Hurstmanceaux appreciated the answer; it did not anger him as it would have done most men.

"Did you see Lord Brancepeth before he died?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Did he tell you to say this?"

"No."

Jack's lips quivered, but he manfully strove not to cry.

Hurstmanceaux was perplexed. He dimly perceived the workings of the boy's mind, and he sympathized with them; but he could not let his sympathy be shown.

"Put me down in the country somewhere," said Jack, seeing his auditor was with him. "I don't want grooms, and watches, and dressing-cases, and rubbish; I want to be alone down in the country."

"My dear child," said Ronald, "what is this new idea? Why do you want to bury yourself in a hermitage at your age? I am not your only guardian, Jack. There's Lord Augustus."

"Then send me to school," said Jack desperately. "People as young as I go to schools. I tell you," he added, and his teeth were shut tight as he said it, "I tell you, I will not live with *her*."

Hurstmanceaux was silent, extremely perplexed, but moved to more feeling for the boy than he had ever felt.

"I will not live with *her*," Jack repeated between his teeth. "I know I am a minor at present and that you can lock me up, and all that sort of thing, but if you make me live with her I will kill myself. A quite little boy, littler than I, killed himself the other day, only because his *pensum* was too hard. It was put in the papers. It is quite easy, and it doesn't hurt—much."

Hurstmanceaux was still silent. Other men would have seized the occasion to point out the unlawfulness of suicide, but he refrained from any rebuke. He saw that the boy was in that kind of mood when nothing which is said in censure can pierce through the heavy fog of a dull despairing sorrow: the fog can only be penetrated by the sunshine of sympathy.

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"You don't like me, do you, Jack?" he said at last.

Jack was silent through truthfulness and courtesy.

"If you did," said Hurstmanceaux, "I would take you to live with me at Faldon, and give you an Oxford friend of mine for a tutor; I don't like the man you have. This is of course subject to Lord Augustus's approval. Would Faldon suit you, if he did not disapprove?"

"Yes," said Jack rather coldly. "He told me to try and grow up like you; so I suppose he would have liked me to live with you."

"Who said that?"

"He did—Harry."

Hurstmanceaux felt an embarrassment which Jack was quick to perceive.

He moved a little nearer to his uncle with the first impulse of confidence he had ever shown in him.

"He gave me Cuckoopint," he said, with the tears gushing from his eyes. "The cob Cuckoopint. May he go to Faldon? But I'll groom him myself, if you please. I want to be a man, not a fool. He told me to——"

Then Jack's voice broke down with a great sob in his throat.

"I beg your pardon," he said in a suffocated voice, and turned that Hurstmanceaux should not see his grief.

"I think you will be a man," said Hurstmanceaux as he laid his hand on the child's shoulder. "Don't sob so. It will vex your friend—if he knows."

"Yes; but will he know?" cried Jack wildly. "Will any one tell him I remember? Oh, I loved him!" cried the boy with a piteous wail. "And she killed him; she killed him, I am sure!"

"Hush!" said Hurstmanceaux. "You are not old enough to judge of these things. I am very sorry for you, for you are too young to have so much pain. Look, Ossian, too, is sorry. He is coming up to you. Lie down on that bearskin, and try to compose yourself. I will do all I can for you. You do not like me, I know, but I think you feel you can trust me."

Jack made a sign of assent; his face was hidden in his hands.

"My poor boy, I am very, very sorry," said Hurstman-

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ceaux, whose own voice was unsteady. "Whatever Lord Brancepeth's life may have been, its end was that of a hero. Think of that, dear, always. You cannot have better or truer consolation."

Alberic Orme, whom Hurstmanceaux always consulted, approved the project, and Lord Augustus had found that the easiest way for his own convenience of discharging his duties to his wards was to say in a benign ecclesiastical manner: "My dear Hurstmanceaux, I have every confidence in your judgment. Whatever you decide I shall ratify, secure that in such acquiescence will lie my best provision for the welfare of my poor nephew's children."

Therefore he made but little difficulty in allowing Jack's residence to be moved to Faldon, and a new tutor substituted for the learned gentleman who had on his part found the little duke insupportable. Cuckoopint went also to Faldon; and Jack, by his own wish, was instructed in the stable science of bedding, feeding, grooming and watering.

Of course Jack was only a boy, and his spirits came back to him in time, and his laugh rang through the old oak hall of his uncle's house, but he did not forget. He never forgot.

When he had been left alone for the night he got up in his bed, and knelt on it, and said in a whisper, for fear his servant who slept in the next room should hear:

"Please God, be good to Harry, and tell him I remember."

O fair illusion; fair, however false! Happy is the dead soul which has left its image enshrined in the tender heart of a child!

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CHAPTER XXXIX.

"We are here," wrote Boo to her eldest brother half a year later. "It's quite hot: one wants summer frocks. There are no end of Germans and Russes to play with; but I don't like them. Mammy's got a new man made of millions, or rather she has not got him and it makes her cross. He gave me a gold Cupid seal—so pretty. She took it away from me, and sent it as a wedding-present to Daisy Ffiennes. Wasn't that like mammy? She never speaks of you. She says uncle Ronnie has made you a bad boy."

The letter was dated from Cannes.

Jack had good sense enough to put the note in the roaring fire of old salt-encrusted ship logs which was burning on the great hearth of Faldon's central hall, before which he and many dogs were lying in the gloom of the December afternoon. He did not envy his sister the roses and mimosa and white lilac of Cannes. His mother had gone there because everybody in the winter does go there, or to Egypt, or to India; but she was out of temper with Fate, as her little daughter had said. She did not wish for more adventures. She dreaded other tyrants. She wanted to have two things in one: liberty and money. Of marriage she was afraid. Where find another Cocky?

Still in her moments of sober reflection she knew that she must marry, or risk drifting into an insecure, shifty, and discreditable position. Liaisons, however agreeable and amusing, are not sheet-anchors. Besides, she had been on the verge of losing her reputation—she knew what the danger feels like; and to become one of the throng of people who live on their knees outside the gates which once opened wide to them would have been infinitely more odious to her than an over dose of chloral. She was Duchess of Otterbourne, but she was very much more in her own sight and that of her family; she was a Courcy of Faldon.

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That memory had been powerless to keep her feet straight in the path of honor; but it was strong enough to make her feel that she would die sooner than go down in the dust amongst the discrowned—the discrowned who live in Pyreneean watering-places, or second-rate Italian cities, or German baths out of their season, and are made much of at the hands of consuls' wives and British chaplains, and who sneak back to their people's country house in England, and are received there as a family obligation, and never more are seen in London between Easter and Goodwood. Such an existence she would no more have led than she would have worn a three-guinea ready-made gown bought at an annual sale. She had always led the first flight in the hunting-field or out of it.

She had, though a very unpoetic personage, this in common with poets and grasshoppers, that she seldom looked beyond the immediate day. But now the immediate day frowned on her, grey and ugly; and, grasshopper-like, she began to feel the shiver and the rime of frost.

Her income under settlement was enough, as her brother had more than once told her, to enable her to live very quietly at her dower-house, or at any quiet rural place with her children. But as she would infinitely have preferred a fatal dose of chloral to such an existence her future vaguely terrified her. It was no longer possible to rely upon Ronald, and she found bankers and lenders were all fully alive to the fact that the widowed Duchess of Otterboure with only her jointure was a very different person to Lady Kenilworth, who had always had the money potentialities of her lord's future inheritance behind her, and had also had the ingenious ability in matters financial of Cocky at her back.

Poor Cocky! Whoever would have thought that she would have so sincerely missed his support as she now did?

Her aunt's legacy was well-nigh finished; she had spent it recklessly. When it had come to her it had seemed inexhaustible, but it actually dissolved as fast as a water-ice in a ballroom. She was much tormented by the sense of her poverty. She felt that she could not afford to run any more risks in supplying the deficiencies

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in her exchequer. She knew that her brother was now aware of her tendency to replace resources by ingenious intrigue; and any step which would compromise her afresh she was afraid to take.

What on earth could she do?

What a wretch William Massarene had been not to leave her some portion of his immense wealth! She thought about it until she persuaded herself that she had been deeply wronged. After torturing her as he had done surely he should have left her at peace for the rest of her actual life! She really thought so. If he had only left his fortune to his wife she could have mesmerized that dull, simple soul into anything. But the fortune had all gone to the woman she hated the most in the world, that stately, lily-like, silent person who had considered that her own songs were not good enough to be sung at the Harrenden House concerts; and who had sent her all those receipts and counterfoils without even her compliments, just as you might send her boxes after a dismissed maid!

She had no inclination to write good or bad music now; she was absorbed in the discords of her life. Her tradespeople in Paris and London were no longer pliant; they even wrote rudely; Beaumont no doubt had talked. Meanwhile she wanted money every moment as a plant wants air.

There was a man near her in Cannes who was made of money and of whom she had often thought: Adrian Vanderlin. But how to reach him she did not know. He was a hermit. He had a beautiful place three miles from Cannes, and was at that moment in residence there; so much she learned from an archduke who had been to see him, but the rest was not easy even to her audacity. Vanderlin, who had divorced his wife and was a financier, would scarcely, she reasoned, be an *ingénu*. If she could see him—well, she had few doubts as to the effect she produced on those who saw her. Experience had justified her optimism.

One day she drove through the olive woods which were on his estate and through which a drive had been cut which was open to the public. She saw the château at a

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distance; it was built in the style of François Premier, and was at once elegant and stately; it had long terraces which looked out on to the sea. It was precisely the sort of place to which she would like to come when east winds were blowing down Piccadilly and north winds down the Champs Elysées.

"How could that woman be so stupid as to separate from him?" she said to the Archduke in whose carriage she was. That gentleman smiled.

"As to give him any cause to separate from her? Well, no one knows the rights of the drama. She was very young and extremely beautiful. Many suppose that she was sacrificed to intrigues of her father's."

"But there must have been evidence against her," said Mouse, who had a great dislike to this woman whom she had never seen.

"There is such a thing as suborned witnesses," replied the Archduke. "Besides, in German courts divorce is given on slight grounds. Myself, I think Vanderlin regrets it, or else I do not know why a man of his years and his wealth should shut himself up away from the world as he does."

"But he must be seen in Paris?"

"By men of business; scarcely any one else. He never goes into society."

"But you see him, sir?"

"On business, on business."

"Could you not show me the château?"

"I grieve to refuse you, but I should not venture. I should look like Mephisto leading a temptress of the Venusberg to disturb an anchorite in a Paraclete."

"What a fool he must be!" said Mouse with sincere conviction.

The Archduke laughed.

"Dear Duchess, there are people, even men, to whom, when the affections go wrong, life seems worthless. Of course you do not understand that. Your mission is to inspire despairing passions, not to feel them.

"You are a charming creature," he thought as he spoke. "But you are as keen after gold as a stoat after poultry. I shall not put you on the track of Vanderlin's. He is a

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great capitalist; but such women as you would eat up the treasure of an empire and still cry 'Give!'—daughter of the horse-leech as you are, with your innocent eyes and your childlike smile."

Mouse said no more on the subject, but she carefully surveyed the approaches of the château and the shore which stretched immediately beneath its terraces. She had a plan in her fertile mind.

She was as at home in the water as a fish; the family at Faldon had always lived half their days in the sea.

Early the next morning she rowed herself out in a small rowing-boat which belonged to one of her friends; she had Boo with her.

"We will go and have a bathe in deep water," she said to the child. They frequently did so. But she did not go out very far, and she steered eastward where the woods of Vanderlin's château rose above the shore. In front of the house, and in sight of it, she took advantage of a moment in which Boo was busy clapping her hands at some gulls to pull up the plug in the bottom of the boat. It began to leak and then to fill. She gave a cry as the water welled up over her ankles, and drawing the child to her rapidly pulled off Boo's clothes, leaving her in her chemise and drawers.

"Jump on my back and put your arms round my throat. Don't hold too hard to choke me. Don't be frightened—I will take you to shore."

With the little girl on her shoulders she cleared herself of the boat as it filled to its edges, and let herself go into the sea, which was quite calm and not very cold in the noontide. Boo, who had her mother's high spirit, and was used to dance about in sea surf, was not nervous and did not cling too closely. Mouse struck out toward the beach somewhat embarrassed by her clothing, but swimming with the skill which she had acquired in childish days in the rougher waters of the Irish Channel.

She knew that if anyone was looking through a binocular on the terraces above she must make a very effective picture—like Venus Aphrodite bearing Eros. Boo, who was amused, rode triumphant, keeping her golden hair and her black Gainsborough hat out of the water. Some-

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men who were on the beach holloaed and ran to get a boat out of a boathouse lower on the shore, but before they could launch it Mouse and her little daughter had come ashore laughing and dripping like two playfellows. Their little skiff, turned keel upward, was floating away to the eastward as the wind drove it.

"There will be several napoleons to pay for that," she thought, as she saw the derelict going fast out of sight. "Never mind if one gets into the enchanted castle."

At that moment of her landing, whilst she stood shaking the salt water off her on to the sand, a voice addressed her from the marble sea-wall above:

"Have you had an accident, madam? You have displayed great courage. Pray come up those steps; my house is at your disposal."

"God helps those who help themselves," thought Mouse, as she looked up and saw a man above who, she felt certain, must be Adrian Vanderlin. "I shall be glad to dry my little daughter's clothes," she said, as she began to ascend the stone steps. "The plug of the boat was rotten; it filled before one could call out even. If you have any outhouse you can put us in—we are as wet as two Newfoundlands."

Boo, feeling that it would be more interesting to do so, had begun to tremble a little and cry, looking a very pretty watery baby-syren.

"Don't cry, Boo," said her mother. "You know you're not frightened a bit, only cold."

"I have sent to my women servants to bring you cloaks," said the owner of the château as he came down the steps to meet her, unconscious of the comedy which had been acted for him. "It was very venturesome," he added, "to come in a rowing-boat with no one to aid you."

"It was very stupid of me not to examine the condition of the boat," she replied. "As for danger there was none. I kept close to land, and my child and I swim like fish."

"So I have seen; but the Mediterranean, if only a salt-water lake as some say, can be a very turbulent one."

At that moment his servants came, bringing wraps in which they hastened to enfold the lady and her little girl,

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who were beginning to feel really chilly. They went up to the house, over whose façade the appreciative eyes of Mouse ranged enviously.

"Pray consider everything here at your disposal," he said courteously. "My housekeeper will take you upstairs, and if you will allow me to advise you, you will go to bed. Meantime, can I send to inform your people?"

She thanked him gracefully, not too warmly, and gave him her address in Cannes.

"If you could get my maid over with some clothes I should be glad," she said, as she went up the staircase looking, as no other woman would have looked, lovely despite the thick wraps and the soaked hair.

"But you have not told me your name?"

"Duchess of Otterbourne," she called back to him, whilst she went up the stairs followed by Boo, who by this time had grown cold and equally cross.

She was taken into a beautiful bedchamber of the Louis Quinze style, with silver dogs on the hearth where a wood fire already blazed.

"It was really very well done," she thought with self-complacency. "I only hope to goodness Boo will not take cold. That man must be Vanderlin himself. He is more good-looking than I expected; and for an anchorite he is civil."

"They're silver," said Boo, surveying the andirons, whilst two maids were rubbing dry her rosy limbs. "So's the mirror," she added as she looked around her after drinking a cup of hot milk; after which she allowed herself to be put to bed and soon fell fast asleep.

Her mother sat by the fire wrapped in blankets and eiderdown.

Even to Boo's busy and suspicious intelligence it did not occur that the plug had been pulled out on purpose. The little secret was quite safe in her mother's own brain.

"This is a very nice house," said Boo with condescension to the owner of it when, three hours later, the maid and the clothes having arrived from Cannes, they went downstairs with no trace in either of their late immersion in salt water, and saw their host in his library.

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"I am honored by your approval," said Vanderlin.

"Boo is a great connoisseur," said her mother.

Vanderlin was a tall and slender man, with a handsome face, spoiled by melancholy and fatigue; his eyes were dreamy and gentle, his manner was grave and gave the impression that his thoughts were not greatly in what he was saying; he at all times spoke little.

He smiled at the child indulgently. "I hope she has felt no ill effects," he said to her mother. "Nor yourself?"

"They took too good care of us," replied Mouse. "It is so very kind of you to have been so hospitable to two drowned rats."

"I am happy to have been of use." He said it with perfect politeness, but the tone suggested to her that he would be grateful if she went away and left him to his solitude.

The indifference stimulated her vanity.

"You have not told me who you are," she said with that abruptness which in her was graceful. "But I think I know. You are Baron Vanderlin."

He assented.

"Why do you not see people?" she asked brusquely. "Why do you shut yourself up all alone in this beautiful place?"

"I come here for rest."

"But even in Paris or London or Berlin you shun society?"

"I do not care for it."

"What a pity!"

"Do you think so?"

"Certainly I do. No one should live alone who is not old and blind and poor."

He smiled slightly.

"If one were old and blind and poor, one would be probably left alone, *malgré soi*."

"Ah, you are a pessimist! I am not. I think the world very delightful and people very good."

"Your experiences have been fortunate—and brief."

He looked vaguely round the room as if he looked for somebody to take her away.

Boo, who had been examining the library, came up to

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him with a little agate Cupid, a paper weight; the Cupid had gold wings and quiver, and was a delicate work of art. "It's pretty," she said; "will you let me have it?"

"Pray keep it," said Vanderlin. Her mother scolded her and protested, she was indeed considerably annoyed at the child's effrontery; but Boo kept tight hold on the Cupid.

"Gentleman don't want it," she said. "He's too old for toys."

He laughed. He had not laughed for a long time.

"Have you any children?" asked Boo.

"No, my dear."

"Why haven't you?"

"They are treasures not accorded to all."

"Treasure is great anxiety, whether it is your kind of treasure or mine, M. Vanderlin," said Boo's mother. "You have been very kind to this naughty little girl; and we have trespassed too long on your hospitality. Yet, if it wouldn't bore you too much, I should so like to see something of the house before I go. I have often wished to enter as I sallied past it or drove through your olive woods."

He assented to her wish with a reluctance which she ignored; and he showed her over the chief part of his château, which contained much which was beautiful and rare. Boo, wishing for everything she saw but warned by her mother's eyes not to ask for anything more, went jumping and running through the rooms, her hat in her hand and the light on her golden head.

"You have several children, I think," said Vanderlin to her mother.

"Four," replied Mouse; and she felt that she would have preferred for this hermit to know nothing about her by reputation.

"Are they all with you?"

"No; they are little boys; their guardians have more to do with them than I."

There was a sadness in her tone which made him look at her with a certain interest.

"Law is very hard on women," she added. "Especially as regards their offspring."

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She was, to men of serious temper, most interesting in her maternal feeling, and it was genuine in a sense though used with artifice. Vanderlin looked at her with less indifference and unwillingness, but she made little way in his intimacy; he remained distant in his courtesy, and as she drove away with baskets of roses for herself and of fruit for her little daughter she felt discontentedly that she had gone through the trouble of her invention, and spent the money which the lost boat would cost, for small purpose.

Boo turned and looked back at the turrets of the château already distant above its woods.

"That's a nice man," she said decidedly. "Won't you marry him, mammy?"

Her mother colored at such unexpected divination of her own projects.

"What odious things you say, Boo," she answered; "and how odiously you behaved, asking for things in that bare-faced way. I have told you fifty times never to ask."

"I shouldn't have got it else," replied Boo, calmly and unmoved, taking the Cupid out of the pocket of her fur paletôt, and contemplating it with satisfaction. She had improved in the science of looting since the day when her mother had made her give back the gold box to Mrs. Massarene.

As the carriage drove along the sea-road Vanderlin returned to the solitude of his library.

It had been unwelcome to him to be obliged to entertain them, and yet now that they were gone he momentarily missed them, the gay bright presence of the child and the graceful nonchalance in speech and movement of the woman. It was years since either child or woman had been in the rooms of Les Mouettes.

The days passed and brought her no recompense whatever for her self-inflicted immersion in the cold January waves. The boat had been found and restored to its owner, so it did not cost her very much. But the sense of failure irritated her exceedingly. Boo importuned her several times to return to the château of the silver dogs, but only encountered a sharp reprimand and was scolded

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for effrontery. The Cupid had been taken away from her and found its home in her mother's dispatch box till it was sent as a wedding-gift to somebody who was being married in the fog in Belgravia. Boo resented the injustice bitterly and meditated compensation or revenge. More than once she was on the point of starting by herself for Les Mouettes, but it was far off, her feet would not take her there, and she could not get away in a boat because her governess or her maid was always after her. "If I could only get there alone he'd give me a lot of things," she thought; she could see the promontory on which it stood some five miles off to westward. But she had to stay in Cannes, and be walked out by her women, and play stupid games with little Muscovite princesses, pale and peevish, and little German countesses, rustic and rosy. Mammy took little notice of her. "She's always nasty when she's got no money," reflected Boo.

Boo knew that there was a scarcity of money.

One day, as she was walking with her governess, which she hated, she saw two gentlemen on the other side of a myrtle hedge. She kissed her hand to one of them and rushed headlong to where a break in the hedge enabled her to join them.

"Good morning!" she cried, rapturously throwing her arms about Vanderlin. He look down at her, surprised at such a welcome.

"Is it you, my little friend? How is your mother?"

"Why haven't you been to see us?" asked Boo.

He smiled.

"I am remiss in those matters. I need education."

"I'll tell you what to do," said Boo. "I know what people ought to do. Come and see mammy now."

"Not now, my dear. I have other engagements."

Boo's brows knit together.

"People break engagements when I tell them," she said with hauteur.

"Mine are business engagements."

"Come!" she said with a stamp of one small foot.

"No, my dear, I will call on you at three if you wish it so much."

"That is a rude way to speak."

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"I am not a courtier, my dear. Run away now. I am occupied. I will call on you at three."

Boo was forced to be content with this compromise; she looked after him as he walked on with his companion, a prime minister.

"He's made of millions," she said to her governess, and her little face had a reverential look upon it.

Her mother was at home at three o'clock in the pretty room with its windows opening on to a flower-filled balcony which cost so much in the first hotel in Cannes. She was reading, and Boo, at a table, was dabbling with some water-color paints, when he who was "made of millions" entered, being faithful to his word.

"Your little daughter reminded me that I have been to blame in not earlier doing myself this honor," he said as he bent over her hand: she thought that he did not look either honored or enthusiastic.

She had a vague sense of hostility to her in him which stimulated her interest and her intentions.

"You owed no duty to two shipwrecked waifs whom you entertained only too amiably," she said with a charming smile. "I am surprised that you have given us a thought."

He had scarcely given her a thought, but he could not tell her so.

He remained with her half an hour, talking in a somewhat absent manner of French literature and of German music.

"What'll you give me, mammy?" said Boo when he had taken his leave, as she dropped down at her mother's feet.

"Give you? What do you mean?" said Mouse, who was irritated that he had not invited her to his château.

"What'll you give me, mammy?" repeated Boo; and her upraised saucy imperious eyes said plainly, "Reward me for bringing the person you wanted or I shall tell him you've sent his Cupid—my Cupid—as a wedding-present to Daisy Ffiennes."

"I will give you a kiss first," said Mouse with apparent ignorance of the meaning of the upraised eyes, "and then I will give you a drive. Run away.'

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To Boo the recompense seemed small besides the greatness of the service rendered. But her short years of life had been long enough to convince her that people were not grateful.

"Man's made of millions," she said dreamily when she was seated by her mother's side in the victoria and Vanderlin, driving a pair of horses on his homeward way, passed them.

"I believe he is," said her mother. "But his millions are nothing to us."

Boo turned her head away that she might grin unrepressed, showing all her pretty teeth to an eucalyptus tree on the road.

Her mother did not like Vanderlin. His grave abstracted manner, his visible indifference to herself, his somewhat ceremonious words bored her, chilled her; she felt in his presence very much as she did when in church.

But she intended him to marry her. She fancied he was weak and unintelligent; she thought she would do as she liked with him and the millions which were undoubtedly his. On his part he would benefit, for he wanted rousing and being reconciled to the world. What was the use of the millions if there were nobody to spend them? She knew that no one could distance her in the art of making money fly about and diffuse itself.

She would much sooner have married Wuffie.

Wuffie was His Serene Highness Prince Woffram of Karstein Lowenthal; he was twenty-four years old, very good-looking, very mirthful and pleasure-loving, very popular and sociable; he was extremely in love with her, and would have given her all he possessed with rapture. But, alas! that all was represented by a rank which was negotiable in the marriage market, and bills which were not negotiable anywhere. He was a fourth son, and his parents were so poor that Daddy Gwyllian declared he knew for a fact that, when they were dining alone, they had the *Volkzeitung* outspread for a tablecloth to save their palatial damask. Wuffie was charming, but matrimonially he was impossible.

Wuffie was then at Cannes, floating himself in the best society, as penniless princes of his Fatherland alone can

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do. She liked him; she had even more than liking for him, but she kept him at a respectful distance, for he did not accord with the grave intentions with which she had swum toward the terraces of Les Mouettes. In racing parlance, she did not dare put her money on him for any big event.

"Why am I out in the cold, darling?" he asked sorrowfully of Boo, who was always consulted by her mother's admirers as an unfailing aneroid.

Boo shook her head and pursed up her lips.

"Why?" insisted the poor prince. "You know everything, Boo."

This appeal to her omniscience prevailed.

"You're very pretty, Wuffie," she said, caressing his golden hair, which was as bright as her own. "You're very pretty, and you're great fun. But you know, poor, poor Wuffie, you haven't got a pfennig to spend."

"Come and see, Boo," said Wuffie, stung by such a statement into mad expenditure, which resulted in the purchase for Boo of a toy opera house, with orchestra, costumes, and personages complete, which had, for three days, been the object of her ardent desires in a shop window in Nice.

"I'll sing all the parts myself," she said raptuously.

"You must give the tenor's to me," said the purchaser of it, with a double meaning.

"Tenors is always spitted," said Boo solemnly. "They're always spitted—or poisoned."

Her mother passed some days in perplexed meditation. She felt that all the charms of her ever-irresistible sorcery would be thrown away on the owner of that delicious sea-palace, and that, as matters now stood, there was not a shadow of reason for the threat of Prince Khristof to be put into execution. But she was tenacious, and did not like to acknowledge herself beaten. She could not readily believe that Vanderlin was so different to other men that he could in the end remain wholly uninfluenced by her. The great difficulty was to approach him, for she felt that she had already committed herself to more than was wise or was delicate in her advances to him in his solitude. She cast about her for some *deus ex machina* that she

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could set in motion, and decided on the old Austrian Archduke.

The Archduke was an old man in years, but not in temperament, and he was highly sensible of her attractions; she did very much as she pleased with him, and he, sternest of martinets and harshest of commanding officers, was like a ball of feathers in her hands. With great adroitness, and the magnetism which every charming woman exercises, she so interested him by her descriptions of Les Mouettes, that he was inspired by a desire of seeing the place for himself, and was induced to overcome both his well-bred dislike to intruding on a recluse, and his imperial reluctance to cross the threshold of a man not noble. In the end, so well did she know how to turn men and things to her own purposes, that, despite the mutual reluctance of both the guest and the host, Vanderlin did, taken at a disadvantage one day, when he met them all three together, invite the old general to breakfast, and invited also herself and her little girl, and the invitations were promptly accepted. It was impossible to be more perfectly courteous than Vanderlin was on the occasion, or to show more urbanity and tact than he did in his reception of them; but even she, who could easily persuade herself of most things which she wished to believe, could not fail to see that the entertainment was a weariness to him—a concession, and an unwilling one, to the wishes of an aged prince with whom his banking-house had, for many years, had relations.

No one was ever, she thought, so gracefully courteous and so impenetrably indifferent as her host was. The child alone seemed to interest him; and Boo, who had taken her cue unbidden from her mother, was charming, subdued, almost shy, and wholly bewitching. She had a genuine respect for the man made of millions.

The Archduke, after the luncheon, tired by his perambulations over the large house, and having eaten and drunk largely, fell asleep on a sofa with some miniatures, which he was looking at, lying on his knees; he was sunk in the heavy slumber of age and defective digestion. Not to disturb him, Vanderlin and she conversed in low tones at some distance from him, whilst the gentleman of his

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household, who had accompanied him, discreetly played a noiseless game of ball with Boo on the terrace outside the windows.

She, who was greatly daring, thought that now or never was the moment to find out what her host's feelings were toward the woman whom he had divorced. It was difficult, and she knew that it was shockingly ill-bred to invade the privacy of such a subject, but she felt that it was the only way to get even with Khris Kar.

They were in a room consecrated to the portraits of women—a collection made by Vanderlin's father—chiefly portraits of the eighteenth century, some oils, some pastels, some crayons, and most of them French work, except a Romney or two and several Conway miniatures. She had looked, admired, criticised them with that superficial knowledge of the technique and jargon of art which is so easily acquired in the world by people to whom art, *qud* art, is absolutely indifferent. She said the right thing in the right place, displaying culture and accurate criticism, and looking, as she always did, like a brilliant Romney herself, very simply attired with a white gown, a blue ribbon round her waist, and a straw hat, covered with forget-me-nots, on her hair.

The room was in shade and silence, full of sweetness from great china bowls of lilies of the valley; the old man slept on with his chin on his chest; the sound of the sea and the smothered ripple of childish laughter came from without. Now or never, she thought, and turned to Vanderlin.

"What an exquisite place this is! What a pity you are all alone in it."

"Solitude has its compensations, if not its distractions," he answered; he was profoundly distrustful of her simple, natural, friendly manner, which seemed to him more dangerous than any other; he believed it to be assumed on purpose to put him off his guard. He thought the Circe who now endeavored to beguile him one of the loveliest women he had ever seen, and he felt convinced that she was also one of the most dangerous. But she aroused neither interest nor curiosity in him, though his mind acknowledged her potent charms.

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"Do you never regret?" she asked abruptly.

"Who can outlive youth without regret?" he replied. He was hostile to her in his mind. He felt her charm, but he resented her approaches. He could not but perceive her desire to draw him into confidential conversation, and the reserve which was natural to him increased in proportion to her persistent endeavor to overcome it.

In herself, she was irritated and discouraged; but she concealed both feelings, and summoned all her courage.

"Is there a portrait of your wife here?" she asked abruptly, turning and facing him.

He grew pale to his lips, and an expression of intense pain passed over his countenance.

"Madame," he said very coldly, "that lady's name must not be mentioned to me."

"Oh, you know, I am a very impertinent person!" she answered lightly. "Perhaps you will say I am a very ill-bred one. But her story has always had a fascination for me. They say she is such a very beautiful person."

He said nothing; he retained his composure with difficulty; this audacious stranger probed a wound which he would not have allowed his most intimate friend to touch.

"I know her father very well," she continued, disregarding the visible offence and suffering with which he heard her; "he has sometimes spoken of her to me. He is not very scrupulous. Don't you think there may have been some misunderstanding, some misrepresentation, some intentional mischief?"

Vanderlin, with increasing difficulty, controlled his anger and his emotion.

"I do not discuss these matters," he said with great chillness. "Allow me, madame, to remind you that the privilege of your acquaintance is to me a very recent honor."

"And you think me very intrusive and insupportable? Oh! I quite understand that. But I have heard things—and it seems a pity—you are not old enough to mope all by yourself like this; and if there was any mistake?"

"There was none."

He said it between his teeth; the recollections she evoked were fraught for him with intolerable torture, and

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he could have taken this intruder by her shoulders and thrust her out of his presence if he had not been restrained by the habits and self-command of a man of the world.

"But she ruins your life. You do not forget her?" said his unwelcome visitant.

"I shall not replace her, madame," replied Vanderlin curtly, weary of the cross-examination, and wondering, half divining, what the scope of it might be.

"Ah, there you are so right!" Mouse murmured. "How can the ruling of a judge undo what is done, efface what is written on the heart, or make the past a *tabula rasa?* You think me an impertinent, tiresome person, I am sure, but I must say to you how glad, how very glad I should be, if I could ever prove to you that you wronged the Countess zu Lynar."

"Why do you speak of such things?" said Vanderlin, his self-control momentarily deserting him. "Does one put out the light of one's life, of one's soul, on mere suspicion? You do not know what you are saying. You torture me. You will make me forget myself. Be silent, I tell you; be silent!"

She looked at him, very sweetly, without offence.

"I understand. You love this woman still. She was the mother of your dead child. I understand—oh! so completely! Well, if ever I can prove to you that I am right and you are wrong, I shall be very glad, for I am quite sure that you will never care for any other person. It may seem to you very impertinent, but I have an idea—an idea—— Never mind, if there be any grounds for it, time will show."

"You speak very strangely, madame," said Vanderlin, agitated to a degree which it was hard for him to conceal, yet extremely suspicious of her motives.

"I dare say I do," she answered without offence, "for I know nothing whatever, and I conjecture a great deal; very feminine that, you will say. Hush! the Archduke is stirring."

At that moment the Archduke awoke from his slumber, astonished to find himself where he was, and looking round for his missing gentleman. Vanderlin hastened, of course, to his side, and the *tête-à-tête* was over, but it had

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lasted long enough for her to be certain that it would be as easy to raise the sunken galleys of Carthage from the violet seas beyond the windows as to revive passion in the heart of her host.

She hastened to leave him and go out on to the terrace to tell Boo to be quiet, for she had, as she had truly said, no knowledge whatever, and merely some vague impressions suggested by the visit and the warning of Prince Khris. But she had gleaned two certainties from her conversation with Vanderlin—one, that he had never ceased to regret his divorced wife, the other that it would be as much use to woo a marble statue as to attempt to fascinate this man, whose heart was buried in the deep sea grave of a shipwrecked passion. She had read of such passions, and seen them represented on the stage, but she had never before believed in their existence. Now that she did believe in them, such a waste of opportunities seemed to her supremely idiotic. The idea of a financier, a man of the world, a Crœsus of Paris and Berlin, sitting down to weep for the broken jug of spilt milk, for the shattered basket of eggs, like the farm girl in the fable! What could be sillier or less remunerative? But she remembered she had often heard that the cleverest men in public business were always the greatest fools in private life.

She drove away in the radiance of the late afternoon in the Archduke's carriage, Boo sitting opposite to her holding disconsolately a bouquet of orchids, of which the rarity did not compensate to her for not having got anything else.

"What a pity that man does not marry again," said the old gentleman, as they passed through the olive and ilex woods of the park.

"I believe he is in love with his lost wife," said Mouse.

"Very possibly," replied the Archduke. "I remember her as a young girl; her beauty was quite extraordinary; it was her misfortune, for it was the cause of his jealousy."

"Jealous! That serene impassive man?"

"The serenity is acquired, and the impassiveness is an armor. He is a person of strong passions and deep affec-

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tions. He adored his wife, and I have always supposed that his susceptibilities were played upon by some Iago."

"But what Iago? And why?"

"Her father, perhaps, and out of spite. But I really know nothing," said the Archduke, recollecting himself, the good wines of Les Mouettes having loosened his tongue to unusual loquacity.

"He didn't give me anything to-day!" said Boo woefully from the front seat; she was unrewarded for her painful goodness, for her sweetly-imitated shyness, for the self-denial with which she had held her tongue, and bored herself to play ball noiselessly with that stout, bald, florid aide-de-camp.

The Archduke laughed.

"Giving is a delightful privilege," he said: "but when we know that all the world is expecting us to give, the pastime palls. Adrian Vanderlin has felt that from the time he was in his nursery. You must allow me to remedy his omission in this instance, my charming little friend."

Mouse went home sorely out of temper; it seemed to her quite monstrous that two persons, like this man and Billy's daughter, should each have had command given them of a vast fortune by which they were each only bored, whilst she who would have spent such a fortune so well, and with so much enjoyment, was left a victim to the most sordid anxieties. There was certainly something wrong in the construction of the universe. She felt almost disposed to be a socialist.

As she went up the staircase of her hotel she was roused from her meditations by Boo's voice, which was saying plaintively again, "He didn't give me anything to-day!"

"I am very glad he did not," said her mother. "You are a greedy, shameless, gobbling little cat."

"You're the cat and I'm your kitten," thought her young daughter, but Boo, saucy and bold as she was, never dared to be impudent to her mother.

When they had left him Vanderlin went up to his bedchamber, unlocked a drawer in a cabinet, and took out of it two portraits, one of his divorced wife, the other of her dead child.

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He looked at them long with slow, hot tears welling up into his eyes.

He would have given all the millions which men envied him to have had the child playing at his side, and the mother with her hand in his.

A sorrow of the affections may not affect the health, the strength, the mind, the occupations, or the general life of a man, but it embitters it as a single drop of wormwood can embitter the whole clearness and brightness of a bowl of pure water; the bowl may be of silver, may be of gold, but the water in it is spoilt for ever; and he who must drink from it envies the peasant the wooden cup which he fills and refills at a purling stream.

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CHAPTER XL.

PRINCE KHRIS of Karstein was at Monte Carlo playing continuously, losing almost always, living in a miserable lodging over a small shop, and devoting, to that blind goddess with a thousand hands who is called Play, his clothes, his sustenance, his last rings and shirt studs. He did this every winter, and every spring he was supplied afresh through his daughter's means, and went to Spa or Luchon and did the same. From Germany he was banned.

One day at the Casino he saw the Duchess of Otterbourne stretching out her slender hand between a Jew broker and a Paris cocotte to put some gold upon the red.

"Ah! blonde devil! blonde devil!" he thought to himself, and wished he might see her lose her last farthing and crawl under a hedge to drink her last dose of morphia. But this he knew he was not likely to see, nor anyone else, for she was not the kind of person who kills herself, and at play she generally won, for she kept quite cool at it and never let it run away with her judgment.

He hated her intensely; he had never liked her, but when she had shut Harrenden House to him, she had excited and merited his most bitter detestation. She had not played fair, and Prince Khris, though he might cheat, abhorred being cheated; he felt it an insult to his intelligence. He had discovered the Massarenes before she had done so; they had been his placer-claim, his treasure isle, his silver mine; she had come after him and profited and plundered. This he might have pardoned if she had kept faith with him and gone shares. But she had acted treacherously. She had mined the ground under his feet. She had taught these ignorant people to know him as he was. She had made them understand that they must drop him, shake him off; that to be seen with him did them social harm, not good. She had annexed them and made them hers; she had created a monopoly in them for her-

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self. She had taken them with her into spheres the entrance into which had long been forfeited by himself. And all this had been done so skilfully, with so much coolness and acumen, that he had been powerless to oppose it. The dinners of Harrenden House had become to him things of the past; the Clodion falconer which he had found for them saw him no more pass up their staircase; they were ungrateful like all low-bred people, and she triumphed.

"The blonde devil! the blonde devil!" he said with a curse.

But for her they would in all likelihood have remained unknown to immaculate society, and would to the end of time have believed in himself as a semi-royal divinity, knowing nothing of the stains on his purples, nothing of the cankered breast which rotted under the ribbons of his orders.

She had not been so clever as the groom of the chamber at Harrenden House had thought her; she had not gone shares fairly with her predecessor in the exploitation of the Massarene vein.

She had made an enemy of him. She thought his enmity was of no consequence because he was a person wholly discredited and despised, but in this she was greatly mistaken; because water is muddy it is not therefore incapable of drowning you.

Khris Kar, who was a person of extreme intelligence, guessed all her motives and all her modes of action, and divined exactly all she said against him.

It is always a dangerous and difficult thing to "drop people," and neither the master nor the mistress of Harrenden House had tact and experience enough to do it in the least offensive manner. Indeed, Massarene himself enjoyed doing it offensively; it made him feel a greater swell than ever to be able to be rude and slighting to a person of the original rank of Prince Khris. It afflicted the tenderer heart of his wife, but she did not dare to disobey orders, and despite his rage the old prince could not be otherwise than amused to note the elaborate devices with which she shifted her parasol so as not to see him in the Park, and fumbled with her handkerchief or her fan

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as he approached at a concert or a theatre to avoid offering him her hand.

He read his fair foe's tactics in the stiff and frightened manner of the Massarenes toward him; he saw that they had been warned he was a bird of prey, that they were afraid to say anything to his face, and could only clumsily draw away from him. He was used to this treatment from his equals, but in these low creatures it stung him painfully; he felt like a disabled hawk having its eyes pecked out by a crow. As he watched, as time went on, the upward progress of these people into that higher world for ever closed to himself, he knew that she had done for them what he had lost all power of doing for them or for anyone. He acknowledged her superiority, but her treachery he intended to repay at the earliest opportunity. One does not pull a ferret out of a rabbit-burrow without being bitten.

As it chanced there came into his hands a weekly journal published at Nice which contained such items of social intelligence as it was thought would interest the visitors to the Riviera, and amongst these was a paragraph which spoke of the boating accident to the Duchess of Otterbourne and the coolness and courage displayed by that lady; it mentioned that the accident had happened off the terraces of the Mouettes. As he read, he thought he saw between the lines; he suspected the accident was one of design; he suspected the rescue of the child by her mother was a brilliant *coup de théâtre*, done with intention to arouse the interest of a solitary.

He made a few careful discreet inquiries; he found that Vanderlin had been to see her at her hotel; he learned that the circumstances of the fair swimmer were embarrassed, which did not surprise him; he heard some gossiper laugh and say that she was intending to marry the great banker; he saw as completely into her mind and soul as if he had been Mephistopheles.

He promised himself that she should not succeed.

Some remorseful regret occasionally stirred in him when he thought of his daughter's lonely life, and when he remembered the passionate love which had been ruptured when she and Vanderlin had parted. He was a

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bad old man with a shrivelled heart and a numbed conscience, but he was human.

Mouse was at that time especially irritated and depressed. There had come to Cannes that week a young beauty, a mere child, but of extreme loveliness and wonderful coloring, very much what Boo would be in a few more years. This young girl, an Austrian just married to a Russian thrice her age, had turned all heads and occupied all tongues at Cannes, and Mouse, for the first time in her life, had the uncomfortable sensation of being eclipsed, of being rather out of it, as she would have said in her own phraseology.

It was a dull and unpleasant feeling which filled her with resentment, and made her stare into her mirror with an anxiety and uncertainty wholly new to her.

She was in this kind of mood when Prince Khris walked up the steps of her hotel.

She had come in from driving, fretful and disposed to think that life was more trouble than it was worth, when they brought her a card, and said the gentleman who owned it was waiting downstairs.

"Khris Kar! What can he possibly want with me?" she wondered. She was disposed to let him remain downstairs, and she was in no mood for visitors, especially those who could be of no possible use or amusement to her.

Then she reflected that she had not behaved very well to him, that he had at one time been very intimate at Harrenden House, and also that he had been the father-in-law, at all events for a few years, of the master of Les Mouettes.

"Show him up," she said irritably to her servant. In another minute the old man entered, frailer, thinner, with the gold dye on his hair more visible, but bland and polished as before, and with the same keen, intent gleam in his pale-blue eyes. She welcomed him sweetly, suppressing a yawn, and seemed as if it were the most natural thing in the world to receive a man against whom society had long closed all its doors.

Who could tell what old Khris might know? She was well aware that she had ousted him out of Harrenden House.

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"You are not looking well, Prince," she said with solicitude, offering him her little silver tray of cigarettes.

"Old age, old age!" said Prince Khris airily, as he took a cigarette and lighted it. "How happy are you, Duchess, who are in all the wonder-blossoming of your youth!"

"That is a nasty one," thought Mouse, for she knew that when your children are growing up speeches of this kind have a sub-acid flavor which it is intended should be distinctly tasted by you.

He settled himself comfortably in the lounging-chair he occupied, and blew the perfumed smoke into the air.

"I am especially fortunate to find you alone," he said. "May I at once mention the purport of my visit, for I know how rare it is to be favored by a *tête-à-tête* with you when one is, alas, old and uninteresting!"

"Pray say anything you like," she replied, the sweetness beginning to go out of her manner and the softness out of her voice, for she felt that whatever his purpose might be it was not amiable.

"Allow me, then," said the old man very suavely, "to ask you if it be true what people say in these places—that you intend to marry my ex-son-in-law, Adrian Vanderlin?"

She was silent from astonishment and annoyance. She did not want to have the keen eyes of this old gambler watching her cards.

"There is not the smallest authority for such a statement," she answered with hauteur, "and I think you might phrase your inquiry more courteously."

He smiled and made a little gesture with the cigarette, indicative of apology or derision, as she chose to take it.

"Why should not either or both of them marry again?" she asked, her anxiety on the matter getting the better of her prudence and good taste.

"Dear lady," replied Prince Khris, "it seems incredible to properly constituted minds, but there are actually persons so disposed by nature that they only love once! It is a lamentable limitation of what was intended to be our most agreeable and varied pastime; but so it is. You know there are some persons who take everything seriously, and drink sparkling Moselle with a long face."

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"Perhaps they will re-marry each other? It is not against the law, I believe."

"No; it is not against the law, probably because no lawmakers ever thought such a case possible."

"How he dislikes them both!" she thought. "Perhaps because they didn't give him enough money, or perhaps because they are maintaining him now."

It seemed to her experienced mind that you would naturally hate anybody who maintained you.

"I heard of a boat upset beneath the terraces of Les Mouettes, of an intrepid *sauvetage* of your lovely little girl on your own fair shoulders," murmured Prince Khris. "I hope the master of the château was grateful, but I doubt it; men of business are sceptical rather than impressionable. I hope you took no cold?"

"None whatever," said Mouse crossly and curtly, for she felt herself *dévinée*, and this sensation is never soothing to the nerves.

"I am charmed to hear it. But is it true that you have an intention to render still richer than he is the singularly ungrateful person who is called the Christian Rothschild?"

"I don't know what you mean," she said sullenly; "and I don't know what this man, Christian or Jew, can matter to you. He divorced your daughter."

It was more than a rude thing, it was an ill-bred thing to say, and she knew that it was so; but her temper got the better of her prudence, as it had done in her interview with Beaumont.

Prince Khris remained unmoved.

"That is matter of history," he said serenely. "The man, as you call him (who is unquestionably a Christian), may have been touched by that heroic spectacle of a modern Aphrodite battling with the waves. No doubt it was intended that he should be touched. All that I wish to say, dear Duchess, is this, that if the report be true that you intend to marry him—and it may be, for millionaires are the only men worth marrying—I merely venture to say that I—well, in a word, I should prevent it. That is all."

She stared at him in unaffected amazement, and her anger was as real as her surprise.

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"How dare you say such things to me?" she said in great offence. "You would venture to imply that the boat was upset on purpose!"

He laughed a little softly.

"The unaided *àpropos* is rarely of occurrence in this life. But perhaps M. Vanderlin was impressed by the accident; men of finance are sometimes children in matters outside their counting-houses. However, all I desired, Duchess, is to intimate to you that if you have any intention of marrying the man who, as you remarked, divorced my daughter, I shall not permit the marriage to take place."

"How can you prevent it?"

"That is my affair. Rest assured only that I can and that I shall."

She was silent, intensely irritated and uncertain how to treat him; she was aware that there was something ludicrous and undignified in her position; she could not allege that Vanderlin had any intention to marry her; she had been taken off her guard and placed in a position of absurd embarrassment.

What could this old man mean? He was too keen and experienced a person to menace what he had not the ability to carry out. Had he known anything of her relations with Massarene?

She knew that he had a long score against her to pay off, that he must hate her and would make her feel its hatred if he could; but he was not a man to indulge in unprofitable rancor.

She said between her teeth: "Do you suppose, if I wished to marry any man, I shouldn't do it?"

"It is impossible to say," murmured Prince Khris. "There are some persons so perverted that they do not like new-mown hay or early strawberries. There may be also persons so dead to beauty and to virtue that they do not appreciate the exquisite qualities of the Duchess of Otterbourne."

"You old wretch!" she thought, with difficulty controlling herself from ordering him out of the room. "I had not the remotest intention of annexing your *ci-devant*

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son-in-law," she said aloud; "but as you have put the idea in my head, perhaps I shall do it."

"Are you sure it is I who put it there?" said Prince Khris, smiling. "Then allow me to take it out again. I do not intend you to marry Adrian Vanderlin."

"What business would it be of yours if I did? He disgraced your daughter before all Europe."

His face remained impassive. "You cannot wonder, then, if only out of vengeance I shall deny him the paradise of your embrace! Be my motive what it will, dear lady, take this for certain: I shall not allow you to carry out your present scheme."

"Sir!" Anger flashed from her sapphire eyes, her voice was stifled by rage. Her "scheme"!—as if she were an intriguing horizontale, a nameless adventuress!

He laid down the cigarette which he had appreciated and finished.

"Remember," he said serenely—"I can say that to Vanderlin which will prevent him from marrying you or any other woman."

"I shall tell him that is your boast."

"You can tell him if you like. He will not believe you, and he certainly will not question me."

"But what could his marriage, were there any question of it, matter to you?" Her curiosity got the better of her rage.

"That is my affair," he replied. "To be quite frank with you, it does not matter to me in the least, but I do not intend you to step into my daughter's place. She is my daughter, though many years have passed since I saw her; and you, madame, shall not sit where she sat, love where she loved, sleep where she slept; you shall not do her that injury. A sentimentalism, you think. No, I am not sentimental, though I come of the land of Werther. But a few years ago you did me a bad turn when I was weak enough to trust you, and I do not forget easily. I can prevent you from reaching the Canaan of Vanderlin's wealth, and I intend to do so. I know what you would do; you would entice him with exquisite skill, and it is possible that you would make him your dupe; in finance he is clever, but in the affections he is a child. Well, take

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warning; let him alone, for if you attempt to succeed with him, I shall intervene. That is all. I have told you to desist because I am not desirous of approaching the man who, as you observed, dishonored my daughter before all Europe. But if you do not listen to good counsels I shall do so, for I repeat I do not intend you ever to reach the Canaan of his riches."

Then, without waiting for any reply from her, he rose, bowed with the courtly grace which to the last distinguished him, and left her presence walking with that feebleness which infirmity and years entailed, but with a pleased smile upon his face and as much alacrity as he could command, for he was in his haste to return to the tables of Monte Carlo.

She remained in a sort of stupor, staring at the smoked-out cigarette which he had left behind him on the ash tray.

She had been so utterly astonished, humiliated, and disgusted that she had not had presence of mind enough to charge him with having brought about his daughter's ruin by his own intrigues and falsehoods.

Unfortunately too she knew so little, so very little, only what the Archduke Franz had hinted to her, and with that weak weapon of mere conjecture she could not have discomfited so skilled and accomplished a master of fence as was Prince Khristopher of Karstein.

How she wished, oh! how she wished that she had let him have his fair share of the spoils of Harrenden House! There are few things more utterly painful than to have done mean, ungenerous, and dishonorable acts, and find them all like a nest of vipers torpid from cold which have been warmed on your hearth and uncurl and hiss at you.

"My great uncle came to call on you!" said young Prince Woffram with astonishment and curiosity. "I saw him in the hall; I don't speak to him, you know—we none of us do. But I felt sorry——"

"So do I whenever I see him," said Mouse in her frankest and sweetest manner. "I have always stood by him, you know. He is so courtly and charming and now so old. It is horribly cruel, I think, to shut one's doors on

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a man of that age. He may have been all they say—I suppose he has—but his sins must have been over before we were born, and when anybody is so old as that I, for one, really cannot be unkind."

What an angel she was! thought the young grand-nephew of Prince Khris; an angel of modern make, with wings of chiffon, which would not perhaps stand a shower of rain or a buffet of wind, but still an angel!

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CHAPTER XLI.

"LORD! my dear Ronnie," exclaimed Daddy Gwyllian, "what poor short-sighted creatures we are with all our worldly wisdom! To think that I ever advised you to do such a thing! Lord! I might have ruined you!"

His astonishment and repentance were so extreme and sincere that Hurstmanceaux was bewildered.

"What did you ever advise me to do," he asked, "that would have ruined me?"

"I told you to marry her."

"To marry whom?"

"Massarene's daughter."

Hurstmanceaux's face changed. "I believe you did," he said stiffly. "I am glad you see the impropriety of telling a poor man to marry a rich woman."

"But she isn't a rich woman!" cried the poor match-maker in almost a shriek of remorse. "I might have led you to your ruin. She has gone and given it all away!"

Hurstmanceaux turned quickly to him with animation.

"What do you say? Given what away? Her father's fortune?"

"Read that," said Gwyllian. "Oh, Lord, that fools should ever have money, and sensible folks be worn into their graves for want of it!"

What he gave Ronald to read was a column in a leading journal of Paris and New York; an article adorned by a woodcut which was labelled a portrait of Katherine Massarene, and resembled her as much as it did a Burmese idol or a face on a door-knocker. The article, which was long, abounded in large capital letters and startling italics. Its hyperbolic and hysterical language, being translated into the language of sober sense, stated that the daughter of the "bull-dozing boss," so well known in the States as William Massarene, having inherited the whole of his vast wealth, had come over to America *incognita*, had spent some months in the study of life as seen in the city of

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Kerosene, and the adjacent townships and provinces, and having made herself intimately acquainted with the people and the institutions, had divided two-thirds of her inheritance between those who had shared in any way in the making of that wealth, or whose descendants were in want.

She had devoted another large portion of it to the creation of various asylums and institutions and provision for human and animal needs in both Great Britain and Ireland, whilst the valuable remainder had been divided amongst many poor families of County Down. The journal said, in conclusion, that she had purchased an annuity for her mother, which would give that lady double the annual income allotted to her under William Massarene's will; and that for herself she had kept nothing, not a red cent. The editor added a personal note stating that Miss Massarene had certainly made no provision for her own maintenance, since she had forgotten to endow a lunatic asylum!

The column closed with the total in plain figures of the enormous property which had been thus broken up and distributed. Hurstmanceaux read it in silence from the first line to the last; then in silence returned it to Daddy Gwyllian.

"Isn't it heaven's mercy you didn't marry her!" cried Daddy. "To be sure you would have prevented this. She must be stark staring mad, you know; the paper hints as much."

"If she had consulted the Seven Sages and the Four Evangelists, she could not have been advised by them to act more wisely or more well," replied Hurstmanceaux with emphasis. "Good-bye, Daddy. Leave off match-making, or you may burn your fingers at it."

He went away without more comment, and Daddy stood staring after him with round, wide-open eyes. Was it possible that anybody lived who could consider such a course of action praiseworthy or sane?

"But Ronnie was always as mad as a hatter himself," he thought sorrowfully as he button-holed another friend, and displayed his Parisian-American paper.

"Ah, yes—frightful insanity!" said the newcomer.

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"I've just seen it in *Truth*. It was wired. Enough to make old Billy get up out of his grave, don't you think? *Sit transit gloria mundi*."

"Damned socialistic thing to do," said a third who joined them and who also had seen *Truth*. "Horrible bad example! If property isn't inviolate to your heirs, where are you? If there isn't solidarity amongst the holders of property, what can keep back the nationalization of property?"

No one could say what would.

"This is what comes of young women reading Herbert Spencer and Goldwin Smith," said a fourth.

"These men are not communists," said the previous speaker. "This lady's act is rank communism."

"Can't one do what one likes with one's own?" asked another.

"Certainly not," replied the gentleman who dreaded the nationalization of property. "We should first consider the effect of what we do on the world at large. This young woman (I never liked her) has said practically to the many millions of operatives all the world over that capital is a crime."

"Capital, acquired as Billy's was, is uncommonly near a crime," murmured the first speaker.

"Capital by its mere consolidation becomes purified," said the other angrily, "as carbon becomes by crystallization a diamond. This young woman has practically told every beggar throughout both hemispheres that he has a right to grind the diamonds into dust."

"I always thought her plain," said a more frivolous listener.

"Fine eyes, fine figure, but plain," said another, "and she was always so rude to the Prince."

"Rude to everybody, and always looked bored," said a person whose hand she had rejected.

"Subversive," said the upholder of property. "Very odd: her father was so sound in all his views."

"I think Billy'll wake and walk!" said the gentleman who had before expressed this opinion; "all his pile split up into matchwood!"

Daddy Gwyllian felt so vexed that he left them discuss-

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ing the matter and went home. Why could not Ronnie have made himself agreeable to her before this horrible socialistic idea had come into her head, and so have held all that marvellously solid fortune together? It made him quite sad to think of these millions of good money frittered away in asylums and refuges and the dirty hands of a lot of hungry people.

Even Harrenden House was sold, they said, just as it stood, with all its admirable works of art, and the beckoning falconer of Clodion at the head of the staircase.

At the same moment the Duchess of Otterbourne was also reading this article in the Paris-New York journal. She thought it a hoax; a yarn spun by some mischievous spinner of sensational stories. When she heard however from all sides that it was true, she felt a kind of relief.

"Nobody will know her now," she thought. "So she won't be able to talk. It is really enough to wake that brute in his grave. I always considered her odious, but I should never have supposed she was mad."

"What do you think of it?" she asked Vanderlin, whom she met the day she had read of this amazing piece of folly. He had not heard of it: she described the salient features of the narrative.

"I know nothing of the lady or of the sources of the fortune she has broken up," he replied, "so I cannot judge. But if she wishes to be at peace she has acted very wisely for herself."

Mouse heard with an impatience which she could not conceal.

"Do you mean," she asked point blank, "that you would like to lose your fortune?"

"One must never say those things aloud, madame," he replied. "For the *boutade* of a discontented moment may be repeated in print by these Paul Prys of the Press as the serious conviction of a lifetime."

"How I loathe your diplomatic answers!" she thought, much irritated at her perpetual failure to entice him out of his habitual reserve. "One can't talk at all unless one says what one thinks," she answered impatiently.

He smiled slightly again.

"I should rather have supposed that the chief necessity

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in social intercourse was to successfully repress one's sincerity: is it not so?"

"You are a very tantalizing person to talk to!" she said with a chagrin which was real.

"Why insist on talking to me then?" thought Vanderlin, and he let the conversation drop; it was too personal for his taste.

Her verdict, more or less softened, was the verdict of the world in general on Katherine Massarene's action.

The action was insane, and to English and American society offensive.

The world considered it had warmed an adder in its breast. Everybody had known her only because of her money, and now she had stripped herself of her money, and would expect to know them just the same!

Besides, what a shocking example! Ought big brewers, instead of ascending to the celestial regions of the Upper House, to strip themselves of their capital and build inebriate asylums? Ought big bankers, instead of going to court and marrying dukes' daughters, to live on bread and cheese, and give their millions in pensions and bonuses? Ought big manufacturers, instead of receiving baronetcies, and having princes at their shooting parties, to go in sackcloth and ashes, and spend all their profits in making the deadly trades healthy? Were all the titled railway directors to pull off their Bath ribbons, and melt down the silver spades with which they had cut the sods of new lines, in order to give all they possess to maimed stokers, or dazed signalmen, or passengers who had lost their legs or their arms in accidents?

Forbid it, heaven!

Society shook on its very foundations. Never had there been set precedent fraught with such disastrous example. It was something worse than socialism; they could not give it a name. Socialism knocked you down and picked your pocket: but this act of hers was a voluntary eating of dust. She, who had supposed that she would be able to do what she choose with her inheritance unremarked, was astonished at the storm of indignation raised by the intolerable example she was considered to have set. American capitalists were as furious as English

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aristocracy and plutocracy, and the chief organs of the American press asked her if she could seriously suppose that anybody would take the trouble to put money together if they had to give it away as soon as they got it?

The publicity and hostility roused in two nations by an act which she had endeavored to make as private as possible disconcerted her exceedingly, and the encomiums she received from anonymous correspondents were not more welcome.

What most annoyed her were the political deductions and accusations which were roused by her action and roared around it. She was claimed by the Collectivists, praised by the Positivists, seized by the Socialists, and admired by the Anarchists. She was supposed to belong to every new creed to which the latter years of the nineteenth century has given birth, and such creeds are multitudinous as ants' eggs in an ant-hill. A ton weight of subversive literature and another ton weight of begging letters were sent to her, and she was requested to forward funds for a monument to Jesus-Ravachol and Harmodius-Caserio.

The Fabian philosophers wept with joy over her; but the upholders of property said that nothing more profoundly immoral than this dispersion of wealth had ever been accomplished since Propriété Nationale was written on the façade of the Tuileries. Tolstoi dedicated a work to her; Cuvallotti wrote her an ode; Brunetière consecrated an article to her, Mr. Malloch stigmatized her action as the most immoral of the age, whilst Auberon Herbert considered it the most admirable instance of high spirited individualism; Mr. Gladstone wrote a beautiful epistle on a postcard, and Mr. Swinburne a poem in which her charity was likened to the sea in a score of magnificent imageries and rolling hexameters.

She was overwhelmed with shame at her position and was only sustained in the pillory of such publicity by the knowledge that the world forgets and discards as rapidly as it adores and enthrones. She felt that she deserved as little the praises of those who lauded her generosity as she did the censure of others who blamed her for subversive designs and example. Her strongest motive power

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had been the desire to atone, in such measure as possible, for the evil her father had done, and to rid herself of an overwhelming burden. Deep down in her soul, too, scarcely acknowledged to herself, was the desire that the Duchess of Otterbourne's brother should know that, if she could not understand the finer gradations of honor as old races can do, she yet had nothing of that mercenary passion which a woman of his own race showed so unblushingly.

She longed, with more force than she had ever wished for anything, that Hurstmanceaux should be justified in that higher appreciation of her which his letter had expressed.

"Why should I care what that man thinks?" she had asked herself as the steamship glided over the moonlit waters of the Atlantic. "I shall never speak to him again as long as our lives last."

But she did care.

This result of her acts annoyed, harassed, and depressed her, for she was afraid that in trying to do well she had only done ill. "But our path is so steep and our light is so dim," she thought, "we can only go where it seems right to us to go, and if we fail in our aims we must not mind failure if our intent was good.

"'"'Tis not in mortals to command success.'"

But her heart was sometimes heavy, and she felt the want of sympathy and comprehension.

Only one message soothed and reassured her: it was a telegram from Framlingham.

"Now the thing is done, I may venture to tell you that I both approve and admire what I considered it my duty theoretically to oppose."

It was the only sympathy she received. From her mother, although she had met no active opposition, she felt that she had no forgiveness because she had no comprehension.

"You've done what you chose, and I hope you'll never regret it. You've your poor father's dogged will, and your poor father's hard heart," said Margaret Massarene,

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very unkindly, on the day that her daughter landed at Southampton.

If she had had an attack of diphtheria or had broken her arm no one would have been kinder and more devoted than her mother; but, for the sorrows of the soul, the maladies of the mind, the nervousness of conscience, her mother had no compassion, because she had no comprehension. To such troubles as those of Katherine least of all; because to the practical views of Margaret Massarene it seemed that her daughter was moon-struck, nothing less; just like poor Ophelia, for whom she had wept at the Lyceum. To be sure Katherine was not at all strange in her ways: she dressed like other people, walked, ate, spoke, and behaved like other people; but she could not be altogether in her proper mind to give away right and left all the fruits of poor William's many years of toil and of self-denial. The pile might have been got together by questionable means, but that was not for William's heiress to think or to judge; she had nothing to do but to be grateful. Her mother watched anxiously for straws in her hair and rosemary "that's for remembrance" in her hand.

Yet she was almost reconciled to her daughter's acts by this uproar over them.

"Well!" she said with a certain dogged satisfaction—"well, Kathleen, you meant to degrade your father, and to spite him, and to undo all he'd done, and to drag his memory through the mud; but it's all turned to his honor and glory. 'Tis of him they must think when they talk of you."

But in the middle of the night, after this utterance, Katherine was awakened by the entrance into her chamber of her mother, who came up to the side of her bed in silence.

"Are you ill?" said Katherine, starting up from her pillow.

"No, my dear," said Mrs. Massarene, sitting down heavily on a low chair and putting aside the volumes which were upon its cushions. "No, my dear, but I couldn't let the night go on without telling you, my dear, as how you're right and I'm wrong, and I beg your pardon for my temper, and the lies I told ye."

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"Oh, mother, pray don't!" said her daughter infinitely distressed. "I'm sure you never said anything which you did not think it your duty to say."

"Well, my dear, we dress up many bad passions and vanities as duty, but that's neither here nor there," said Margaret Massarene, a white, cumbrous, shapeless figure enveloped in Chuddah shawls. "I've been wrong to be out of temper with you, and to deny to you as your father's money was ill got. Ill got it was; and all the princes and nobles in the world can't alter that, though it did seem to me as how they did when I see 'em all a-kneeling and a-sighing round his coffin. Ill got it was, and may be you've done well to get rid of it, though most folks will call it a pack of stuff to scatter away millions as if ye were scattering barley to chicks. No; hear me out; I shouldn't hev done this thing myself, and I think 't would hev been better to do it more gradual like and less high falutin, for it has set all the world gossiping and grubbing in the past; but 'tis done, and I won't let it be a bone of contention between you and me."

"I thank you very much," said Katherine humbly, the tears rising to her eyes.

"There aren't anything to thank me for," said her mother. "I'm an ignorant body and you're a learned fine lady—a 'blue stocking,' as people say; and your ways of looking at things I can't follow. I suppose you've found 'em in your Greek books. But when I told ye I didn't know as your poor father's pile was ill got I told you a lie; for many and many's the night I've been kep' awake thinkin' o' the poor souls as he'd turned out of house and home. He was a hard man—smart, as they say over there: and he bought the lawyers right and left, and nobody ever did nought to him—till that man shot him at Gloucester Gate."

"Mother," said Katherine in a hushed voice, "I have learned who that man was. Did ever you know Robert Airley?"

Margaret Massarene reflected a minute or two.

"Yes, my dear. I mind him well: a long, thin man, soft-spoken and harmless, with a pretty young wife; they came from the North. Your father bought his bit o' land,

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his 'placer-claim,' as they say out there, and found tin on it, and 'tis now in full work is that lode—'tis called the Penamunic mine."

"I know," said Katherine, and she told her mother how she had learned the request of Robert Airley and what she believed to have been his errand to England.

Her mother listened without surprise.

"I mind him well," she said again. "He must have been driven desperate indeed, for he was a gentle soul and wouldn't hev hurt a fly when I knew him. I always thought, my dear, as how your father would lose his life through some of those he'd injured; but he'd never no fear himself. He was a great man in many ways, Katherine."

"As modern life measures greatness," said Katherine.

Margaret Massarene was crying noiselessly.

"'Tis so dreadful to think as he got his death through one he wronged," she murmured between her sobs.

"Yes, mother," said Katherine gravely; "and that is why I told you all the money was blood-money and I could not keep it. Perhaps you are right. Perhaps you are right that I should have done this thing more gradually, more wisely, more secretly, but I acted for the best. I felt as if a curse were on me so long as I did nothing in atonement."

"I won't say no more against it, my dear," said Margaret Massarene with a heavy sense of resignation. "But you haven't left yourself a jointure even, and who will ever marry you now?"

Katherine smiled.

"Do not let that vex you. I will live with you, and you will give me twenty pounds a year for my clothes, and it will be wholesome discipline for me, and I shall be able to have a new gown once a year, which ought to be quite enough."

"Oh, Katherine, how can you jest?" said her mother, with fresh tears; for, though the great world had laughed at her, worried her, tortured her, robbed her, harassed her, she had been pleased and proud to be in it, and now she was to "climb down," and be nobody in particular, and have a penniless daughter who talked of dressing on twenty pounds a year and who would never marry!

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"We will be very happy together, mother," said Katherine with a caressing tenderness of tone, rare in her, as she took her mother's hand, which was resting on the eider-down coverlet of the bed. "I may have done this thing too quickly and not wisely, but I breathe freely and am content."

Margaret Massarene sighed.

"My dear, you won't be happy. You'll repent. 'Tis a pity you weren't made like the Duchess of Otterbourne. *She* wouldn't have quarrelled with your father's pile."

"Certainly she would not," said Katherine bitterly, "and I am sorry you wish me like her, mother."

Margaret Massarene reflected a moment, drying her tears.

"My dear, 'twould be better for you. People only call you odd and queer. You see, Kathleen," she added with that shrewdness which early life had taught her, "in what you've done, you've as good as said to all other people that they're knaves: it's very bad to be thought above one's generation, my dear. Jesus cleared the Temple with a scourge; but they paid him out for it, my dear—they paid him out for it on Calvary."

The excitement which had sustained her throughout her arduous and self-imposed task had subsided and left, as all spent forces do, a sense of lassitude and weariness behind them. A fatigued impression of failure and of loneliness was on her.

She had done what had seemed to her right in the best way which had been open to her. But she could not be sure of the result. She had used great volition, great energy, great resistance in her late work, and her strength had for the time spent itself. It had left a solitude round her in which her personal *ego* seemed to awake and cry like a lost child in the dark.

Her future wore no smile and offered her no companionship. Whilst her mother lived she felt that she must not leave her; and Margaret Massarene was strong and hale, and likely to live long. Whilst her mother lived she could never herself attempt to lead any other existence than that which she led now. True, in it she could study as much as she pleased, but study in this moment of de-

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pression did not seem to her the Alpha and Omega of life as it always had done.

All that she had heard, seen, and learned of brutal practical appetites and needs within the past twelve months haunted her; she had cast from her her father's wealth, but she could not shake off the shadow of his sins. His memory pursued her like a ghost.

It was a morbid and exaggerated idea, she knew that; no one shunned her, no one execrated her—at the utmost people thought her an absurd quixotic young woman, absolutely uninteresting now that she had divested herself of her golden ornaments: she knew that. But she felt herself in spirit and in destiny like the hangman's daughter, as Hurstmanceaux had said, who, through no fault of her own, was shunned by all, and execrated by all, merely because she was the hangman's daughter!

One day, soon after her return, she was walking again through that pine-wood on the little estate in which, nearly a year earlier, she had been greeted by Framlingham. She had a reefer's jacket on her arm, and held a white sunshade over her head, for the air was very mild. Her gown was of that pale silvery grey which she often wore; there were a few Malmaison roses and a ruffle of old lace at her throat. She walked slowly and with no energy suggested in her movements; in truth, she felt weary and spiritless. For many months both her intelligence and her volition had been stretched like a bent bow, and now that they were spent the inevitable reaction set in with both her will and her mind. She had accomplished her great task; it was done and could not be undone; she had no illusions about its success, she could only hope that it might bear good fruit.

The grey, still, windless day was without a sound. Even the sea was voiceless. The weather and the landscape seemed languid and mournful, like herself. She could not regain her lost energy. She felt as if she had given it away with her father's fortune.

As regarded her own future she had no illusions either. She expected nothing agreeable from it. She knew that her mother had said quite rightly—she would never be happy. Her nature was proud and everything connected

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with her caused her shame. Her affections would have been strong, but they had no object. Her talents were unusual, but they were out of harmony with her destiny and her generation. It seemed to her that she had been only created to carry on in her own soul a mute and barren revolt against all the received opinions and objects of the world in general. Was the world right, and was she wrong? Had she been presumptuous and vain-glorious in opposing her own single opinion to the vast serried masses of human prejudice and custom?

She made her way slowly through the pine trees and the rhododendrons to the bench where she had sat with Framlingham, from which the sea was seen and the shores of Tennyson's island were visible. It was a fine calm day, with diaphanous mists in the silvery offing. She thought of the line in the "Prometheus," and of Lecomte de Lisle's beautiful rendering of it: "*Le sourire infini des flots marins.*"

Some fishing cobles were half a mile off, trawling; in the offing a white-winged vessel—a yacht, no doubt—was bearing toward the island; inland, some church bells were ringing far away, but sweet as a lark's song. She sat still and wished that she could feel as poets felt, which was perhaps being more near them than she knew. She had sat there some time, the roses faded in the light, and she was so motionless that some wrens in the pine boughs over her head picked larvæ off the branches without heeding her.

She had been there an hour or more. Argus sometimes chasing imaginary rabbits, sometimes lying at her feet, when steps crushing the carpet of pine needles behind her made her turn her head.

A tall man wearing yachting clothes was coming through the shadow of the trees; he uncovered his head as he approached, evidently knowing that she was there.

"I beg your pardon," he said vaguely, with some embarrassment; then he came behind her and stood still—it was Hurstmanceaux.

She was so much surprised that she said nothing. He came round the trees and stood in front of the bench on

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which she was sitting. The light shone on his fair hair and the color rose slightly in his face.

"I beg your pardon," he said again. "I am an intruder on your privacy, but I have come here on purpose to say to you——" He hesitated, then continued—"To say to you how much admiration and esteem I feel for your noble action."

She was still too surprised to reply, and almost too troubled by various conflicting and obscure emotions to comprehend him. She could not believe her own ears, and the memory of that false report of which Framlingham had spoken seemed buzzing and stinging about her like a swarm of bees.

"I do not suppose you can care for my approval," he added as she remained silent, "but such as it worth you command it—and my most sincere respect."

"Every one thinks me mad," she said, with a passing smile as she strove to recover her composure.

"Do swine see the stars?" he said, with impatient contempt. "Of course it looks madness to the world. May I ask one thing—does your mother's income die with her?"

"Yes," replied Katherine, more and more surprised, and vaguely offended at the unceremonious interrogation.

"Then if she died to-morrow you would be penniless?"

"What a very odd question!" she said, recovering her self-possession. "Certainly I should be so; but I could maintain myself."

"What would you do?"

"I really cannot say at this moment. Play at concerts perhaps, or teach Latin or Greek to children. I do not see that it can concern anyone except myself."

His questions, which seemed to her rude and intrusive, had restored her to her natural calmness, though her heart beat a little nervously against the Malmaison roses. The sun was in her eyes and she did not look at him, or she would have understood the expression in his own. He came nearer to her; his head was still uncovered.

"I am afraid I have forgotten my Greek. Will you teach it to me?"

"I really cannot understand you," she replied, vaguely

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annoyed and much astonished; if he had been any other man, she would have thought he had taken too much wine at luncheon.

"I must speak more clearly, then," said Ronald with some embarrassment. "Will you marry me?"

"How can you jest?"

"I should scarcely jest on such a subject," said Hurstmanceaux. "I mean absolutely what I say. I admire you more than I could tell you. Your memory has haunted me ever since that winter walk in the snow. But I, of course, could have never told you so if your father had lived, or if, he being dead, you had kept his money."

She was silent; she breathed with difficulty; a tremor shook her from head to foot.

She was so utterly amazed, so thunderstruck and stunned, that the light, and the sea, and the stems of trees, and the green woodland shadows, all went round her in dizzy circling mists.

"Why are you so surprised? You must have heard many men before now express the same wish as mine."

"Oh! only for one reason."

"That reason exists no longer. In putting away from you your father's wealth, you at least acquire the certainty of being sought for yourself."

"You speak in derision, or in compassion."

"Derision? Who could dare deride you? Your worst enemy, if you have one, must admire you. As for compassion, if there be any in the desire I have ventured to express to you, it is for myself."

She was still silent. She was so violently startled and shocked that a sensation of faintness came over her; her lips lost color, her sight was troubled.

"It is utterly impossible," she said, after long silence, in a low, hoarse voice. "You cannot mean it. You must be out of your mind."

"I always mean what I say. And I cannot see what there is to surprise you so greatly. True, you know me very little, and the few times I have seen you I have been rude to you."

"I cannot believe you! It is wholly impossible."

"It may seem so to you because our only previous in-

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terviews have been stormy and cold, and my expressed opinions were offensive, though you were generous enough to say that you agreed with them. But from those interviews I bore away an impression against which I contended in vain. As long as you were the heiress or holder of Mr. Massarene's fortune, my lips were sealed. But now that you stand in voluntary and honorable poverty, looking forward to work for your living when your mother dies, I see nothing to prevent my saying to you what I have said."

"I am not less my father's daughter."

"No, and I will not say what is untrue. I wish that you were the daughter of any other man. But in the East I have seen beautiful lilies growing out of heaps of potsherds. You are the lily which I wish to gather. Your purity and stately grace are your own; your fine temper and you unsullied character are your own. William Massarene is dead. Let his sins be buried with him. After all, he was not worse than the great world which flattered and plundered him. You have done all you could to atone for his crimes. Do not let his ghost arise to stand between you and me. That is, at least, if you could care for me. Perhaps it is impossible."

She breathed heavily; she felt faint; her sight was obscured.

"You say this to me, to me, to the daughter of William Massarene?"

"I will not lie to you; I wish to Heaven you were the daughter of any other man. But his vileness cannot affect your honor. You know me very slightly, and I insulted you when we did meet. But there are sympathies which overstep time and efface all injuries. As long as you held your father's fortune I could say nothing to you; but now there is no barrier between us unless it exist in your own will."

"But there is your sister!"

His face darkened.

"If you mean the Duchess of Otterbourne, I have no acquaintance with her."

"But all your family?"

"I have long borne all the burdens of my family; I am

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not disposed to consult them on a matter which concerns myself alone. My wife will be respected by all of them. Do not fear otherwise. And," he added, with a smile, "we will not sell our game to Leadenhall or send our Shetland ponies to the mines."

The allusion to their walk through the snowy lanes made the absolute reality of what he was saying break in on her like a burst of light, light bewildering and unbearable.

"You must be out of your mind," she said, in a broken voice, "or you are playing a cruel comedy."

"I am not a comedian. And why should you suppose it unlikely for a man to love you and respect you?"

"But you!—I am his daughter. You said once—it was like being the hangman's daughter. I am low born, low bred; I am utterly unworthy in my own sight."

She was painfully agitated. She could not control her emotion. Her heart beat tumultuously, her lips were white and trembled.

"Madam," said Hurstmanceaux, very gravely and with extreme grace, "you are the woman that I love. If you accept what I offer, I swear to you that my family and the world will receive and reverence my wife. I can say no more. My future is in your hands."

It was impossible for her to doubt his sincerity; she was silent, overcome by emotion. She did not look at him as she answered.

"I am deeply touched," she said, in a low tone. "I am honored——"

He gave an impatient movement.

"Yes—honored," she repeated, and her lips quivered.

She paused a moment to steady her voice.

"I appreciate your generosity and your confidence," she added. "But I cannot wrong either. I cannot do what you say."

"Why?"

"Why? For innumerable reasons, for reasons as countless as those sands."

"One will do! Do you dislike me? Do you resent?"

She shook her head.

"No. Oh, no!"

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"Do you think you would not be happy with me?"

"I am certain that you would be miserable, and I so too to know that I had caused your misery."

"Allow me to judge for myself. There could be no question of misery for either."

She made the same gesture of protest and dissent.

"What fantastic folly comes between us!" he said angrily, for he was not a patient man. "You must surely allow me to know my own mind."

"No doubt you think you know it. I am sure you are wholly sincere. I tell you—you honor me. But the future you wish for would make you wretched. You think you would forget my origin, but you could not do so. You would reproach yourself for having brought base blood into your race; you are prouder than you know—justly proud, I think. You would be too kind to show it, but you would regret every hour of your life. And I—I could not live to see that and know myself the cause."

"You must think me a poor, weak, flickering fool!"

"Not at all. But you are speaking on impulse, and in cold blood you would lament your impulse."

"I am not speaking on impulse. I come here in deliberate choice after long reflection."

"And can you say that when you thus reflected you did not feel that marriage with me would sully your race?"

He was silent. He could not and would not lie to her.

"You are nobility and purity yourself," he answered, after that silence. "You are not responsible for the sins of your father."

She smiled a little, very sadly.

"Nevertheless, I am the hangman's daughter; and a Courcy of Faldon must not wed with me. Go! God be with you. I thank you for the trust you have shown in me, and I do not abuse it."

"That is your last word?"

"Yes, it must be so."

He grew very white, and his eyes darkened with anger; he was annoyed and indignant; an immense offence was his first and dominant feeling. He was misunderstood, doubted, rejected, when he had in the fulness of his heart brought and laid at her feet the greatest gift he could

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offer. He did not stoop to plead with an ingrate. He bowed low to her, and in perfect silence turned away. The sound of his steps on the fallen fir-needles made a faint crackling noise on the still air.

She stood looking seaward, but of sea and of sky seeing nothing.

Her dog whined wistfully in sympathy, knowing that her motionless serenity was sorrow.

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CHAPTER XLII.

ABOUT two weeks from the time of the unwelcome visit to her of Prince Khris, the Duchess of Otterbourne, descending the terrace steps of her hotel, met, as he ascended them, young Woffram of Karstein.

"How dull you look!" she said to him. "What on earth is the matter? Are you going to enliven us with a sensational suicide?"

The young man smiled, but with no mirth in his smile.

"Something horrible has happened, though not a suicide," he answered sadly. "My poor granduncle Khris, the one who came to you the other day, has fallen down in a fit at the rouge-et-noir table yonder."

With a gesture toward the east he indicated Monte Carlo, which lay in the distant curves of the coast.

"Is he dead?" she said eagerly.

"No. But he is dying. Hugo von Börn told me. He has just come from there. He saw it."

"You seem singularly afflicted!" said Mouse with a little laugh to conceal the impression which the news made on herself.

"Well," said Prince Woffram with embarrassment, "the death of a good man, you know, isn't half so shocking as the death of a bad one."

"Indeed?" said Mouse. "I should have thought just the contrary. But then I don't see things by the light of the Lutheran religion! Where did Prince Khris live? Who had he with him? Who will look after him?"

"I fear he is past looking after. Where his lodgings were I don't know; they were something very poor, for all his money went at the tables. I think—don't you think?—I ought to go and see if I can do anything for him?"

"But your people don't know him, you say?"

"No; but when an old man is dying things seem different. I think I ought to go."

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"Telegraph for your father's permission," said Mouse, leaning against the balustrade and playing with her long gold muff chain. She was thinking of many things: she was certain in her own mind that the man now stricken down at Monte Carlo could tell much about his daughter's divorce, if he could not, which she thought possible, tell that which would reunite his daughter and Vanderlin. It would never do to let his grandnephew, who was simplicity and veracity incarnate, get to the bedside and hear what might be the deathbed confessions. She wished to do that herself, for knowledge is always power.

The complete security with which Khris of Karstein had told her that he would prevent her schemes as to Vanderlin ever bearing fruition, must certainly point to one thing only, that he had the means to clear the character of his daughter to her divorced husband.

She hastily reasoned that, however odd it might look to others, she must see the old man before he died. After all, her visit to him could be put upon charity; poor Charity has borne many heavier and uglier burdens than the rosy children with which Correggio loaded her.

She felt moreover that she would like to see him, lying speechless, paralyzed, impatient; he had been so odiously rude!

Still playing with the long gold chain, she turned her eyes on young Woffram, dazzling him with their azure light.

"I feel like a brute to do nothing for him," said the good-natured young cuirassier. "As to telegraphing to my father it would be a mere waste of money; he would never bear his uncle Khristof's name mentioned."

"Then I think you would do very foolishly to go near the old man," said his friend. "It would embroil you with your people, and go against you at Berlin. I told you the other day that I am not afraid of compromising myself by being kind to people who are under a cloud. I will go and see after Prince Khris if you like; I was going to Monte Carlo to-morrow—I will go to-day instead. There is a train in an hour. I will telegraph you word how he is."

The young man stared at her.

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It seemed very angelic, but he was not accustomed to see her in such an angelic light, though he adored her. Simple and unsuspecting though he was he could not help seeing that there must be some interest in this offered charity beyond the benevolence visible on the surface.

"It would be wonderfully good of you," he said with hesitation. "But would it not look rather odd?"

"I never care what a thing looks," she replied with impatience, "and really, my dear Wuffie, I don't believe even an international jury of British and German matrons would put a scandalous interpretation on a visit to a dying man of seventy-eight years of age!"

"He's only sixty-eight," murmured his grandnephew. "But of course, if you don't mind, it would be exceedingly kind of you, and—and——"

"Where is Prince Khris living—do you know?"

"No."

"Oh, I can soon find out when I get there. He won't be far from the Casino."

The young soldier was surprised. He had not thought charity abode within the white bosom of his enchanting friend. He could not easily imagine her sitting by a discarded and despised old sinner's deathbed. He had seen her in many characters but never in that of the ministering angel when pain and anguish wring the brow.

"What on earth is she up to?" he thought, and said a little awkwardly:

"He didn't win much, I think; he'd just got on a run of the rouge when he dropped——"

"My dear Wuffie, I'm not going to steal his winnings!" said Mouse with her pretty crystal clear laugh. "I've known him a long time, poor old man, and it's only human to go and look after him. People at Monte Carlo are wild beasts, and they didn't look off the tables I dare say, when he fell, and I am sure none of them will go near him. I shall take the two o'clock train; you can come over on Sunday as we agreed."

Prince Woffram meekly acquiesced. He felt that there was something which he did not understand in the air; although not very quick of perception, and although very much enamored, he vaguely suspected that his unknown

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greatuncle must possess letters or papers or knowledge which might compromise this ministering angel if she did not get to the bedside before somebody else. He adored her, but he had no illusions about her, the few he had ever had, like roses rudely shaken, had fallen before the merciless revelations of his friend Boo.

Boo and her governess accompanied her that day on her mission of mercy. She knew too well the value as social shield of her little daughter's presence. She was genuinely fond of the child; but if she had not been fond of her, she would nevertheless have appreciated and utilized the safety which lies in such an accompaniment. As for the governess, she was discretion itself, saw nothing, heard nothing, that she was not to see and hear, and was easily purchased for all eternity by a bracelet at Christmas or a ring at Easter.

As the train ran through the beautiful coast scenery, so familiar to her that she had ceased even to look at it, she had such a vague titillation of curiosity and excitement as a young panther may feel who for the first time smells a human footprint on the grass. She liked intrigue and comedy for their own sakes; even if they had no consequences they passed the time amusingly and lent a sense of ability and power. The combinations of life are like those of whist or chess—they exercise the intelligence, they flatter the consciousness of skill.

She was more convinced than ever that Prince Khris had the power to reunite his daughter and her divorced husband. The idea of a *femme tarée* reigning over the beautiful Les Mouettes was odious to her and ridiculous. She had a most profound contempt for women who were compromised. She felt for them what the head of the herd is said to feel for the lamed and stricken deer. She had indeed no patience with them, for it was they, the silly demonstrative creatures, who set society's back up and made things uncomfortable for wiser persons. A woman like Olga zu Lynar who had married into all this money and had not known how to keep it seemed to her perfectly idiotic. She felt that if she herself had acquired all these millions her own conduct would have been perfectly exemplary; at all events wholly unattackable.

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But she desired intensely to know the truth about this unworthy *divorcée*, since until she did know it she could not make her own plans with any chance of success. As the train swung on through the tunnels her pity for herself was extreme; it was cruelly hard that she should always be driven to do all kinds of unpleasant and dubious things because other people were so inconsiderate and annoying.

Why could not old Khris have had his fit before coming to interfere about Vanderlin? She could not really be sure that he had not already seen Vanderlin; the latter had been impenetrable, and clearly on his guard that day of the breakfast at Les Mouettes. She felt that she was playing a dangerous game in the dark—playing lawn-tennis blindfolded. But it therefore interested her the more.

It was the merest chance that she would gain anything by visiting the old man; but, on the other hand, she would not lose anything, and she would look amiable; it seemed to her also clever to have remembered the few words about him which had been spoken by the Archduke. It is just such *à propos* remembrance, such connection of trifles, which make clever detectives and successful spies. As the train ran on she apparently listened to the chatter of Boo over a big sack of bonbons and a big bouquet of lilies of the valley, but in herself she was thinking that her ingenuity and intelligence had merited a better fate than that of having to worry about hotel bills and scheme to marry a banker. She did not like the idea of marrying Vanderlin, she did not think he would be facile, though he had the reputation of being generous; she did not think that he would be likely to let her make ducks and drakes of European finance as it would have diverted her to do in his place; he looked grave, he was serious and sad, and he bored her. Besides, she would have preferred to marry no one. But there was nothing else that she could do, or at least nothing else which promised so well, which offered so much solidity and comfort for the future. Therefore she went on through the olive-woods and by the edge of the blue sea to Monte Carlo.

When Boo and the bouquets and bonbons were left in safety at the Hotel de Paris, she caused herself to be

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dressed in the simplest black gown she possessed, put a grey golfing cloak over that, and with a felt hat and a thick veil went out all alone; hoping to pass unperceived in this place which was filled with hundreds of men and women of her world, and hundreds also of worlds of which hers knew nothing.

She had learned that Prince Khris was to be found in a house out of the town, where he had a modest chamber, whither he had been carried speechless and apparently unconscious on the previous night, when he had dropped, huddled and bent like a collapsed marionette, amidst a crowd of gamblers who scarcely turned their heads to see what had happened.

It was a small poor chamber over a grocer's shop in the outskirts, in which there lay dying the man who had seen sentinels present arms when he had passed as a young child in his donkey chaise, with a lady of his father's Court in charge of him, across the Platz of the small ducal city.

She felt a sense of pain as she ascended the narrow uncarpeted stair in the close unpleasant atmosphere.

"Has he not even a valet?" she said to the old woman who left the shop to show her the way upstairs.

"No, madame," answered the woman. "We look after the poor old gentleman as well as we can; there is only me and my sister; and one of us must attend to the business."

Mouse shivered a little as she heard; it was a realization of indigence by which she had never been before confronted. Want of money she had known, and debt and great anxiety; but she had never been without servants, up a rickety stair, above a smelly little shop. It shocked her to see a man of this rank, of her own world, thus utterly abandoned like any beggar who had fallen by the roadside.

The frightful callousness of human nature when it is not softened by deference to wealth and self-interest struck her with its chill brutality like a handful of ice flung in her face. She was no kinder herself; still the realization of the rough and jeering egotism of the world momentarily hurt her. She thought of Buckingham dy-

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ing alone in the garret. There was the solidarity of class between her and the fallen prince; and there was also the possibility that she herself might some day, in some far away old age, be no better off than he.

The woman opened a low door as she spoke, and Mouse saw into the room—a poor place with grey walls, a brick floor, spare furniture, and a narrow bed, whereon lay what was left of the once courtly and elegant person of Prince Khristof of Karstein. There was one window through which the slope of an olive-covered hill was visible.

He was conscious, though motionless and speechless; he opened his eyes at the unclosing of the door, but he did not recognize his visitor through her thick veil. His features were twisted and drawn, his hands lay supinely on the rough woollen coverlet; he looked almost already a corpse: there was only life in the steel-blue, watching, apprehensive eyes, into which at her appearance there came a gleam of wonder, perhaps of hope.

"It is very horrible!" she said, with a thrill of genuine distress.

"Are you a relation, madame?" said the woman of the house.

"Only a friend. Does the doctor come often? What does he say?"

"He comes but little," replied the woman. "He knows he will never be paid, and he knows nothing will be of any use."

"Is it quite hopeless?"

"It is only a question of hours."

"Why did you not send for a *sœur?*"

"We did, but they are all out. Will you be at the charge of the burial, madame?"

"Send for another," said Mouse; "there are scores of them."

"Will madame guarantee all expenses?" asked the woman.

Mouse hesitated; she did not wish to have her visit there known or her name given.

"I am sure the family of the prince will repay everything," she answered. "They are great people."

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The woman smiled dubiously. "Is he really a prince, madame? They are all princes here, but they pawn their shirts all the same."

"He is really a prince—a serene highness; he is allied by blood to one imperial house and two royal houses."

The woman looked dubious still; a napoleon would have better eased her doubts.

"That is nothing, madame," she said with contempt; "those people pay less willingly than anybody."

During this colloquy the eyes of Prince Khris watched intently; his brain was not clear, and his ears seemed stuffed up and filled with buzzing noises, but he understood that they were talking of him. She had put back her veil and he had recognized her. Why was the blonde devil there? Why was not Olga there instead? He had forgotten time, he had only a confused notion of things; he had recognized the blonde devil and he was afraid she should get at his papers, but all the rest was mist and confusion. His memory of his daughter was of her as a little child—a little child in a white frock, with a pearl necklace and great brown eyes and a cloud of dark soft hair. When she had been a little child he had never done her any harm.

The old dame retired, well pleased to see a lady take her place, and she, left alone, came up to the bedside forcing herself to conquer her natural aversion to painful and unlovely scenes: she was vaguely afraid of that mute, paralyzed figure. She dreaded intensely lest the doctor should arrive before she should have been able to do what she desired; but for that reason she deemed it prudent to seem anxious for his presence. No one bent on a dubious errand would ever endeavor to hasten a doctor's arrival. The motionless figure on the bed looked entirely unlike the man whom she had known as Khris Kar: entirely unlike except for those steel-blue eyes which were staring at her without recognition, but with challenge and inquiry, for his brain was still conscious. That gaze frightened her. After all, what business had she to be there? She was momentarily unnerved; but she had courage and audacity, and she controlled her nerves and looked away

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not to see those searching eyes in the lean, waxen, distorted face.

She went to the window and closed the wooden blinds, for the setting sun was strong though winter was scarce past. Then she took off her hat and veil, and moved about the small chamber putting it in order as she had seen nurses do in sick-rooms, and filling a glass with fresh water from a pitcher which stood on the floor. The place was horrible to her; its air was close, its scent bad, its floor was not clean, the chairs were rush-bottomed, the table was deal; but there was one thing which belonged to a different sphere, one thing which attracted her and seemed to suggest that her errand might not be fruitless —it was a despatch-box of Russian leather, with initials and the crown of a serene highness in gold or silver gilt above its lock. If there were any papers of consequence in the room, that box, much battered by frequent travel, contained them. Moreover, when she approached and dusted it, she saw the eyes of the man on the bed dilate with menace. She left it at once and cut a lemon into the glass of water and went to the bedside with the drink. The shaded light fell across the bed. She saw the eyes of the paralytic stare upward at her. Then into them came a ray of comprehension—a flash of hate.

"It *is* the blonde devil," thought the still conscious brain, which had lost all power to communicate its thoughts to the lips and tongue.

"Dear Prince, do you know me?" said his visitor very softly. "I am so sorry to find you here, and so ill. I should like to be of some use."

The kind, soft words found their way to the dulled, imprisoned brain; she saw that by the expression of the eyes; for the eyes in answer said to her: "I am half dead—I am almost wholly dead; but I am not so utterly dead yet that I can be fooled by you. Blonde devil, what is it that you come here to seek?"

She observed that his eyes, leaving her face, turned anxiously in the direction where the despatch-box was; she saw also that round his throat was a steel chain with a small gold key. In that box was there any message for his daughter, or for Vanderlin, or any proof that he had

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brought about their separation? It was evident that he was afraid the box should be touched. This interested her. She was pleased that her instinct had led her right. She did not dare to act in any way; he might not be entirely paralyzed as the people said; he might not be so absolutely sure to die, or to remain speechless until his death; she knew nothing about his malady, except that he had dropped down suddenly when punting at Monte Carlo.

She felt that he suspected her, that he would, if he had use of his voice, have ordered her out of the room; she read all that in his regard. Prudence necessitated the continuance of the very tiresome *rôle* of ministering angel. She dared do nothing until the doctor should have confirmed the hopelessness of his state. She was excrutiatingly bored, and somewhat frightened. The horrible spectre on the bed looked like a ghoul so lean, so colorless, so distorted, so motionless. She had nothing to do, she felt a palpitating terror lest he should recover the power of speech; she believed that people struck down by hemiplegia did so recover it sometimes. She held a spoonful of lemonade to his shut lips; but he did not open them, he only glared at her. The spoon was of a common white metal, ugly, yellow, discolored; she hated to touch it.

At that moment a heavy step was heard on the stair and a broad, bearded, rough-looking man entered with his hat on his head; it was the doctor.

"*Sapristi!*" he shouted very angrily; "what do you send for again and again and again. The man is as good as dead. All the science in the world could not save him. You waste my time. You——"

Catching sight then of a lady in the room he pulled off his hat and muttered his excuses: he was very busy, he had many sick people, people who were curable, the man on the bed could not recover.

"Oh, pray do not say so!" said Mouse with much apparent feeling. "Do they not recover sometimes? I think I have heard——"

"A man of that age cannot recover," said the doctor impatiently. "He is practically dead already. He will

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not live through the night, if you can call him still living. You are a relation?"

"No. But I have known him in other years, when he was less—less fortunate; and I know all his people."

"The lady says they are royal," murmured the woman of the house.

"Royal!" echoed the doctor with scorn. "If they were the consul would be after him like a dog after a bone."

The consul! Mouse remembered with a shock that such a person might indeed arrive at any moment. She had not thought of this possibility.

The doctor had gone up to the bed, turned down the bedclothes, placed his stethoscope over the heart, and listened.

"He will die in three or four hours," he said, as he turned again from the bed. "The heart is exhausted; it has lost almost all power of propulsion. Let me hear when all is over. Madame, your servant."

He hurried out of the room, clapping his hat on his head and noisily clattering down the stairs.

"You may go," said Mouse to the woman of the house. "I will stay a few hours here. Meantime try and get a *Sœur de Charité*."

"Who will pay for all this expense, madame?" said the woman. "Who will pay for the burial and all the rest?"

"You must send to the German consul—he will tell you," said Mouse. "I ought to have thought of it before. I cannot stay here much longer, but I will stay till someone in authority comes. Go; send at once to the consulate."

"You talk very glibly of sending here and there and everywhere," said the woman rather rudely.

Mouse put ten francs into the woman's hand, wishing to make a friend of her. "And send for the consul at once that I may speak to him," she added, for she always remembered appearances.

It was growing dark. By her watch it was a quarter to six. All light had faded off the olive-clad slope in front of the window. She had had no afternoon tea. She began to want her dinner, and, after all, she might be boring herself to no purpose, on a mere fool's errand.

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The woman came in with a petroleum lamp smelling atrociously.

"Send for a nun," said Mouse, who only desired to get rid of her. "Send for another doctor. The Prince cannot lie like this."

"Very well, madame," said the woman. "But errands cost money. People won't run messages for nothing."

Mouse gave her some more silver and bade her find a messenger. She was anxious to be rid of her, for in her presence it was impossible to open the box. She was resolved to open it. It was not a pleasant thing to do, but she had an intuitive sense that it was worth doing.

She was glad that neither the woman nor the doctor had asked her who she was. She summoned all her fortitude to her assistance and approached the bed.

She saw that he was, as the doctor said, very nearly lifeless. His breathing was labored and painful, his heart scarcely beat any longer. His eyes were closed. They had ceased to stare at her. How could she sever the little steel chain round his throat? He could not cry out or raise his hand to oppose her; she leaned over him and took hold of the key. She shrank in all her nerves from the horror of touching him, but she put a strong pressure on herself and tried to wrench the key from the ring on which it hung. He seemed insensible and unaware of what she was doing. But suddenly, as she succeeded in wrenching open the ring, breaking her shell-like finger-nails in doing so, his eyelids were lifted and consciousness once more glared at her from his regard. She felt herself turn white with terror and disgust, but she did not loosen her hold and she pulled the key off the ring. His eyes cursed her, but his curse was impotent.

She hurried to the leather box, fitted the key in its lock, and opened it. She did not even look back at the bed. She was in haste lest the consul or someone else should come up the stairs. In the box there was nothing but papers. There were the diplomas of orders; there were certificates of marriage and birth; there were some old letters; and there was a large sealed packet addressed to Vanderlin. There was nothing else. Whatever it might once have held of value had been removed pre-

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viously by himself, and the stars of the orders had been pawned and lost.

She took out the packet addressed to Vanderlin, laid the other documents in order, locked the box and returned to the bedside to put back the key on the chain.

Then she saw a change which it was impossible to misread. He was dead. The cerebral excitement, caused by his recognition of her and of her endeavor to seize the key, had killed him. He was dead and could never bear witness against her. She fastened the little key on its ring, drew the sheet up over his breast, and with a shudder left the bedside. Then she opened the bodice of her gown and put the packet against her corset; it was bulky, but when she put on her golfing-cloak it did not show.

When the German consul mounting the stairs opened the door of the chamber he saw a lady in black and grey, who kneeled by the side of the bed, the lamplight illumining the golden coils of her hair. He was greatly touched and impressed. She rose from her knees and addressed him with a sweet, sad gravity.

"My poor old friend expired but a moment ago," she said softly. "I am so glad I came. He would otherwise have died in solitude. Oh, how harsh and cruel is the world!"

Then she gave him her name and address, said that she had known the dead man from her childhood, and had come to nurse him because she had understood that he was all alone.

The consul, a simple sturdy man of business, was deeply moved. When he had executed the few formalities necessary, and affixed his seal to the despatch-box, he begged this charming and compassionate stranger to allow him the honor of driving her back to her hotel.

"Why was not his daughter with him?" she said to the consul. "Oh, I know why—they have quarrelled; but it is such a sacred tie! Surely——"

"The Countess Olga has always been most generous to her father, madame," replied the gentleman. "But it was of no use. It was pouring money into sieve. I have telegraphed to her. She will probably come in person, but she cannot be here before another day at the least."

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"How fortunate I had the start of her!" thought the ministering angel of this deathbed, as she watched the consul affix his seals to the old despatch-box, of which the only contents of any value were lying safe against the satin and lace of her stays. She would have infinitely preferred slipping away unseen from that sorry house, and finding her way as she could, on foot or by cab, back to her hotel unseen by anyone. But her mind quickly grasped all the points of a question, and she immediately perceived that her visit to be creditable must be unconcealed, and when the fascinated official offered to drive her back to her hotel, she accepted the offer, realizing all the solidity, veracity, and respectability which his countenance of her conferred. She left the woman of the house in charge of the dead body, and with an aureole of virtue round her head descended the stair which she had ascended on so questionable an errand.

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CHAPTER XLIII.

When she reached the hotel, everyone was already gone to the concert at the Casino; it was Thursday night; she got to her own rooms unperceived, and told her maid that she had lost her way in the olive woods, was terribly tired, and only wished for some hot soup and a cutlet, she was indeed fatigued and worn out; she had found the good consul's cab dreadfully slow and rickety; his great coat had smelt unpleasantly of very coarse tobacco, and the night was cold and the way into the town seemed endless.

She did not venture to look at the packet she had stolen until she was safely in the warmth of her bed, with a reading lamp beside her, and an eider-down quilt over her. She did not feel at ease, and she was haunted by vague terrors. The steel-blue eyes of the dying man haunted her. Hatred, powerless, but only the more intense for its impotency, had stared at her with a look which she felt that she would never forget if she lived for a hundred years. Moreover, she knew that she had committed a crime, or what people would call a crime if they knew of it. She knew that it had been an ugly thing to do; the kind of thing which people who are well-born and well-bred do not do. There is a class of sins which are well-bred; there is another class which is caddish. She knew that this act of hers belonged to the latter category.

Nevertheless, she opened the packet when she was quite safe from interruption, whilst the mellowed light of her reading lamp shed its soft radiance on her pillow, and the billets of olive-wood were burning fragrantly upon the hearth. Her pulses beat unevenly as she opened it, for it was very possible that she had gone through all this agitation and danger quite uselessly. There might be nothing in it whatever of interest or value.

She undid it with great care so as to leave the seals unbroken. Oddly enough, there recurred to her at that moment the memory of her little son looking at her with his sorrowful angry eyes and saying:

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"I don't know much, but I think—I think—I think you are a wicked, wicked woman!"

Was she a wicked woman?

It was a very unpleasant, vulgar kind of thing to be! She had always thought that wicked women belonged exclusively to the lower classes. The idea that she might be wicked was disagreeable to her; it was as though she had been forced to wear a cheap gown or carry a cotton umbrella.

The stare of the dying man had brought the same charge against her. She did not think the charge was true. She was only a woman, all alone, in difficult circumstances, who tried to help herself; that was all. The fault was clearly with those who had placed her in those circumstances; with Cocky first of all, with Ronald next, and, above all, with that dreadful brute whose bones lay in the crypt at Vale Royal.

The documents were all in German, but she knew that language well and read them easily. There was nothing dubious in them. They were the confession of Khris of Karstein of the wickedness he had done in bringing about the separation of his daughter from Adrian Vanderlin, and the proofs of the false testimony he had caused to be brought against her. They were indisputably genuine, attested, and positive. They had been lying in his despatch-box for years; perhaps his remorse had not been strong enough to impel him to condemn himself, or perhaps he had reserved them for still greater stress of want when he could use then to obtain subsidies, or perhaps, seeing nothing of Vanderlin, he had been in doubt as to how far they would be welcome. She who had now possessed herself of them did know how precious they would be esteemed. But would she dare to give them to either Vanderlin or Olga zu Lynar? What history could she invent, plausible enough, probable enough, to account naturally for her possession of them? Would she, if she could think of one—would she have the courage (some people would call it the effrontery) to carry through such a piece of comedy?

Her nerve had been shaken by all she had suffered from William Massarene. She was no longer as sure of her own

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audacity and dexterity as she once had been. She would have burnt these papers without the slightest hesitation if burning them would have done her any good; but their disposal, unburnt, cost her much torturing indecision, and she could not forget the glare of old Khris's dying eyes, so full of impotent hatred.

On the other hand, as they were genuine, and bore internal evidence of their *bona fides*, there could not be any doubt thrown on their accuracy, nor on the unblemished motives of her intervention. No one could blame her for giving documents to the person to whom they were addressed. She understood that they were worth many millions to the man made of millions, as Boo called him. She read them all twice over to be sure that she had made no mistake in her perusal and estimate of them. No! She had made none. Their meaning was clear as crystal. There could not be two constructions of their text and import.

What should she do with them? She was uncertain.

Where was Vanderlin?

In Paris, they said.

Burn them, and continue her scheme of marriage?

Tell him, and withhold them until she got what she wanted?

Either choice had its drawbacks. She was conscious that both were what people would call discreditable. She endeavored to think of something which should not be discreditable, yet should be profitable.

Sitting up against her pillows with a pink plush dressing-jacket trimmed with swansdown on her shoulders, and her bright hair rolled closely round her head, she looked a charming, innocent, poetic picture in the warm and fragrant atmosphere of her chamber.

Painful emotions were odious to her; tragic events still more so; she liked her life to be all dressing and dining and flirting, doing theatres, leading cotillons, hunting with the best horses, laughing and being amused, the whole sprinkled intrigue and stimulated by exciting much passion and feeling a little.

But anything serious she detested, anything painful annoyed her.

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She wished she had let the despatch-box alone. She was alarmed and discouraged. The papers were all which she had expected to find them, but she had not courage to use them. She was like a person who steals jewels and then is afraid to sell them, or pawn them, or wear them, for fear of inquiry. She cried a little from the wretched tension of her nerves and over-fatigue. She took a few drops of chloral and put the documents under her pillow and decided to try and go to sleep. Night brings counsel.

In the morning, after her bath and her coffee, things wore a different aspect. She did not see the old man's dying stare, nor the boy's reproachful sad eyes, any longer. She made up her mind suddenly; she said to her maid, "Pack up a day gown and an evening gown—I am going away for two days." And said to Boo's governess, "Take care of Lady Beatrix, and don't let her get into mischief; and take care nobody lets her go to the Casino."

She wrote a telegram to Wuffie at Cannes: "So thankful I came. I could soothe his dying hours, and persuaded him to a tardy repentance. I go to Paris on his errand. The consul is charged with his burial. Will explain on return."

The consul's name looked well, she thought, in this message.

The young cuirassier did not recognize his correspondent in this mood; but he was simple and sentimental by temperament, and he was in love. He put the note in his pocket with a photograph of her which he had carried for three months next his heart, and went to the golfing-ground. He could not resist speaking of her there to a cousin, a very big cousin, no less a person than the gentleman with the glassy eyes whom Katherine Massarene once had snubbed.

"Is it not good of her?" he said enthusiastically to this very big cousin.

"Extremely good," replied that gentleman. "So very good, indeed, that I have difficulty in picturing the duchess in such a *rôle*. But women are protean."

Wuffie pondered on the reply and failed to understand it.

She, meanwhile, of whom the great personage spoke so

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irreverently, was rushing swiftly across Central France, her strength sustained by a well-filled tea-basket of the latest invention, and most extensive resources. With her traveled the dead man's papers. She was alone nearly all the way; at that season every one was coming southward, few were going northward, except some English members leaving Monte Carlo play and pigeon-shooting for the opening of Parliament, rueful and gloomy at their lot.

Her mind was filled with unformed plans and conflicting projects. She formed a fresh one every minute. She could not decide what would be the surest wisdom, and she felt so afraid of her own indecision that Paris was reached all too soon for her.

She went to her favorite hotel and had a night's rest. There was snow in Paris and on the surrounding country. The temperature seemed very low after that of the Alpes Maritimes, and her spirits sank with the mercury. But in the morning she had herself dressed becomingly with sable furs which enhanced the beauty and delicacy of her complexion and the golden gleam of her hair, and went out of the Cour d'honneur of the great caravanserai on foot. It was not very far from the end of the Rue de Rivoli in which there was situated the vast and imposing building called the Maison Vanderlin, where ministers were suppliants and kings were debtors. Her heart quaked within her as she ascended its broad white steps.

Even yet she had not decided what it would be best to say; but inside her muff were the documents which she had taken from the despatch-box.

"Is M. Vanderlin in Paris?" she asked the stately functionary who waited beside the inner glass doors.

"Yes, madame," he answered.

"Is he in the bank this morning?"

"Yes, madame."

She passed within. She gave her card.

"I require to see him alone," she said to the officials who received her.

"It will be impossible," they answered her. "M. Vanderlin sees no one except by appointment."

"Try," she urged on them. "Take my card. Say that I come on an urgent matter."

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"It is impossible, madame," they reiterated. "He never receives anyone without previous arrangement, often weeks in advance. At this moment the Minister of Foreign Affairs is with him."

"Gaulois? Oh, I know him well! Show me to a private room, and when M. Gaulois comes out, bring him to me."

The officials were moved by the beauty and grace of the suppliant, and consented to let her wait in a small apartment warmed as all the building was by hot air, and looking on an inner court where a fountain played.

The time that she waited was not more than twenty minutes, but it seemed to her to be hours. At last the minister was ushered into her presence; an agreeable, sagacious, unscrupulous man of the south of France, who had begun life as an advocate in the town of Dax.

He was her humble servant; he was at her feet; he would move heaven and earth to do her bidding; but if it were a question of seeing Vanderlin, that was impossible; he regretted it profoundly, but it was impossible; two ambassadors, a nuncio, an Orleans prince, and an English banker were all waiting their turn of audience.

"One would think that he was a king!" she said irritably, while tears of rage and disappointment started to her eyes.

"Alas! madame, he exercises the only sovereignty truly potent in modern life—that of wealth," said the minister. "He is greatly occupied, and the rules which regulate his interviews are rigorously observed. May I ask if you know him?"

"I know him, yes." She added, after a moment's hesitation, "I require to see him. Prince Khristof of Karstein-Lowenthal is dead."

Gaulois was astonished.

"That was the father of the lady he divorced? His death can have nothing to do with Vanderlin?"

"Yes, it has; I require to see him."

Gaulois was perplexed. At last he reluctantly consented to return to Vanderlin's room, and inform him of her presence and her desire. She was again left alone; the rippling of the fountain the only sound on the silence.

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She had burnt her boats; she could not turn back now. The time again appeared to her interminable, though it was not more than eight minutes before the minister returned.

"Dearest lady, I have done my uttermost, but it is impossible that he can receive you here. If you will leave word where you are staying, he will have the honor of waiting on you at four o'clock. Alas! men of business are insensible and *farouches!* Allow me, duchess, to profit by Vanderlin's austerity, and enjoy the felicity of driving you home."

There was nothing else to be done. She was forced to let the loquacious and amiable Gaulois conduct her to his *coupé*, and was obliged to laugh and talk with him, and consent to be carried by him to breakfast with his wife at his official residence on the Quay d'Orsay. Since William Massarene had passed out of her life, she had never found it so hard to counterfeit the gaiety and interest which are necessary in social intercourse.

"Did you tell M. Vanderlin of Prince Khristof's death?" she asked of Gaulois as he accompanied her downstairs after breakfast.

"*Ah, mon Dieu, non!*" exclaimed the minister. "Who speaks to any man of a divorced wife's family?"

"I was wondering if he had any feeling at all for the poor old man," she said with much pathos.

"I should think none; very pardonably," replied the minister. "The poor old man drew an allowance of a thousand francs a month from Vanderlin and it all went in play."

"But the poor prince had some conscience?"

"Had he indeed? He concealed it very carefully throughout a long life."

"*Ma belle* Sourisette!" he thought, "what secret have you got hold of that you are going to try to sell to Vanderlin?"

He had been a lawyer, he was now a statesman; despite his loquacity he was very discreet; he told no one that he had met her at the great banking-house in the Rue de Rivoli.

By the time breakfast was over it was nearly three

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o'clock, and when she returned to her hotel she gave an hour to her toilette. She was conscious that she looked what Parisians call *défaite*. She was nervous and undecided, and she dreaded the visit of Vanderlin whilst she desired it. It was only a little after three when she went into her *salon* which looked on the Rue Rouget de Lisle; and sat down to wait for him vainly trying to read the morning journals.

She always dressed in accordance with the character she assumed, and she wore a rather sombre loose gown of grey velvet trimmed with chincilla and old Mechlin lace, a kind of gown that Vittoria Colonna or Blanche of Castille might have worn. Her own personality only revealed itself in the diamond arrow run through the coils of her hair and the little bouquet of heliotrope at her throat. She was melancholy but she was preëminently seductive.

Punctually as the timepiece struck four Vanderlin was announced. He entered and saluted her with his usual grave and distant courtesy.

"You desired to see me, madame? I am at your commands, of course. I hope Mr. Gaulois explained that it was impossible for me to receive you this morning."

No one could have been more courteous, but she felt that he was on his guard against her and that he saw her desire to see him singular; the perception of that did not decrease the embarrassment she felt. She was Venus, but he would never be Tannhäuser.

After all, she did not want him to be Tannhäuser: she only wanted some small share of his million, some little mouse-like nibbling at his golden store.

"You must have been much surprised at my request," she said as she motioned to him to be seated. "But I have a communicatiou to make to you. I was present at the death of Prince Khristof of Karstein."

The expression of Vanderlin's features grew very cold.

"The fact of that death was telegraphed to me," he replied. "It cannot concern me in any way."

"Are you sure of that?"

"Perfectly sure. Nor can I conceive why you, a total stranger, were with him."

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"I was not a stranger to him. I have known him many years; and I am about to marry his grandnephew. He was altogether abandoned; he had not even a servant or a nurse; I did what I could."

Vanderlin was silent; he, like the royal person on the golfing ground, had difficulty in imagining her in these circumstances. He wondered what she was aiming at—what she desired.

"I did what I could," she repeated; "he suffered greatly; he was completely paralyzed; but for a few moments he recovered his speech a little, and he made me understand—various things."

She paused, hoping to excite his curiosity, wishing to induce him to interrogate her. But he remained mute; he was used to listening in silence whilst people revealed to him their necessities, described their projects, or endeavored to awaken his sympathies.

She was discouraged and embarrassed. Changing her manner she said with her natural abruptness.

"You were much attached to your wife, were you not?"

She had the pleasure of seeing his composure rudely disturbed; an expression of extreme pain, a flush of extreme offence, came on his face: an unhealed wound had been roughly touched.

"On that subject," he said briefly, "I allow no one to speak to me. I told you so at Les Mouettes."

"But I am going to speak to you!" said Mouse with her more natural manner, "whether you allow it or whether you don't. As I tell you, I will be quite frank with you," she continued with a graceful embarrassment which became her infinitely. "I had wished to know you, to attract you if I could. Say it was vanity, necessity, love of money—what you will; I admit that I had that idea when I was so hospitably received by you."

A gesture of impatience escaped him; she was telling him nothing that he did not know.

"But," she pursued, "when I had that brief conversation with you after luncheon at your house, I understood that your heart was closed to all except one memory. With the prior knowledge I possessed of your wife's

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father, and the recollection of certain hints he had given me, I conceived the idea that he could if he chose establish her innocence. I determined to try and persuade him to do so if he possessed the power as I thought. I went for that purpose to Monte Carlo; and on reaching there I learned that he had been struck down by hemiplegia at the tables."

He was now listening to her with great intentness, his eyes dwelling on her with a searching interrogation which did not make her part the easier to play. They were eyes trained to read the minds and penetrate the falsehoods of others.

"I found the poor old Prince all alone in a miserable room with a bear of a doctor, and not a nun even present to see to his wants. I am not a very susceptible person, but it hurt me to think of what he was, and all he might have been. I did what little I could for him, and he recognized me, and was pleased; one could see that by his eyes. I sent all over the place for nurses, for physicians, for the German consul, for the Lutheran pastor, but no one came until the end—too late. He had lodgings in an out-of-the-way country road; I suppose he could not afford any better—everything went at the tables. Well, he recovered his faculties a little, and he made me understand that he was repentant and wretched because he had wronged his daughter and separated her from you. He was almost inarticulate but I managed to make out his meaning; I know German very well. I gathered that your wife was innocent; that she was the victim of suborned witnesses, and that her father had been the chief fabricator of the testimony which ruined her."

Vanderlin with difficulty controlled his emotion. He was used to conceal his thoughts, but for once his reserve broke down, and he was unable to conceal his anxiety.

"Go on! Go on!" he said in a breathless vein. "Are there any proofs of what you say?"

"Hear me out," she said with some impatience. "What Khris said was mumbled, incoherent, rambling, his tongue moved with difficulty. But I understood so much as this. That the lady they call the Countess Olga zu Lynar, and whom as you gave me to understand you

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have never ceased to regret, is absolutely innocent of any offence against you. Your jealousy was wickedly aroused and your credulity abused."

"These are words!" cried Vanderlin. "I want proof! What proof did he give you? He was always a knave and a comedian."

"Poor old Khris!" said Mouse softy and sadly. "He was sincere on his deathbed, at any rate, for he confessed to sins which no one would wittingly assume." Then she added with a certain embarrassed but graceful *câlinerie*, "I have proof, proof positive; his attestation and those of his bribed witnesses. But what will you give me for them? I am a very poor woman, M. Vanderlin, and you are a very rich man!"

Vanderlin rose impetuously; he looked twenty years younger; the mask of impassive coldness which he had worn so long dropped; his natural expression was revealed, his eyes shone with the light of hope and expectation.

"I will give you anything you wish!" he answered. "Anything! Of what use is wealth without happiness?"

She changed her tactics, for she knew that to make any demand was dangerous and unseemly; and she realized that this man's gratitude would be boundless and his generosity as great.

"It was only my jest," she said with a smile. "I am not a *cabrioleuse*. Here are the documents. I am, of course, not a very good judge of such things, but they seem to me quite indisputable."

Then risking everything on one chance she gave him the packet.

He turned away from her and went to one of the windows and stood so that she could not see his countenance, whilst he examined the papers with the swift but unerring perusal of a man accustomed every day of his life to examine and adjudicate upon important documents.

It seemed to her years that he stood thus, the curtain falling so that she could not see his face. Her anxiety was terrible. If the papers should not satisfy him? If he did not desire reunion with his wife? If her own acts should appear to him, as they well might do, effrontery,

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interference, attempt at extortion? Above all, if he should not believe the description she had given him of the last moments of Khristof of Karstein? She was safe from all risk of contradiction. The doctor could not declare that the dying man had not recovered speech during his absence. The consul had only arrived when he was already dead. The woman of the house could testify to the presence of the foreign lady in the chamber from early afternoon to late evening. Her narrative was absolutely safe from any discovery of its falsity. But still, she felt afraid of Vanderlin. Since she had seen the interior of that great establishment of the Rue de Rivoli, and had heard of all those great personages waiting in his antechamber, he seemed a much more imposing individuality to her than had seemed the sad and solitary master of Les Mouettes. But her conscience was clear. If she had cheated him in the manner, she had not cheated him in the matter, of her revelations. The papers were genuine. That was her great point. The one solid and indisputable truth which underlay like a rock of safety her whole impudent fabric of lies.

After what seemed to her a century of silence and suspense he left the embrasure of the window and turned toward her. His face was still pale and grave, but there was the light of a great happiness upon it, of an immense relief; the frozen snows of an endless sorrow had melted in a moment, the sun shone on his path once more.

"Madame, I thank you," he said in a low voice which had a tremor in it. "For eight years I have not lived. You have given me back to life."

She had the supreme tact, the supreme self-control, to dismiss him as though she had had no other purpose in her action than to do simply what was natural and kind in obedience to a dead sinner's trust.

"I am very glad," she said simply, with that perfect intuition which had so often served her purpose so well: "and now go. I am sure you must wish to be alone. I am very, very glad to have been of use to you and glad that the poor old man did make some true atonement at the last."

Profoundly touched, Vanderlin kissed her hands.

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"I will return to-morrow at this hour; you must tell me your embarrassments and employ my resources as you will. Command my friendship as long as my life lasts." He hesitated a moment, then added with an infinite tenderness of tone: "I am sure you will also command that of Olga."

Left alone, as the door closed on him, she buried her face on the sofa cushions and cried and laughed hysterically, for the strain on her nerves had been very great. Then she threw her tear-wet handkerchief into the air and played ball with it. What fools men were! Oh, what fools! Taking their passions and affections so seriously and tragically, and letting a love and its loss spoil all the gains of the world to them. Then pride in her own genius and success danced like a band of elves before her eyes. Sarah Bernhardt herself could not have played that part with more exquisite art.

She touched the electric bell, bade them telephone for a *coupé* and a box at the Gymnase, and then had herself put in visiting trim, and when the *coupé* pulled up by the peristyle went out to see some friends of the Faubourg St. Germain whose day for afternoon reception it happened to be.

In the circles of the old aristocracy she was sure not to meet the republican minister, Gaulois. She did not wish to see him. She felt as if he would read in her eyes that she had triumphed in her interview with Vanderlin. She was a little ashamed of what she had done; not much, for success and shame are not sisters, but a little.

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CHAPTER XLIV.

Two days later Olga zu Lynar was seated by her fireside in the home of her choice in the Swabian Alb, where the March day had none of the sunlight and fragrance of Monte Carlo. Snow was still deep in the passes of the hills, and blocks of ice were breaking up on all the rivers. The great oak and pine-woods were black against heavy stormclouds, and enclosed the landscape on all sides save one, where they were cleft abruptly by a narrow gorge, which alone gave access to the world beyond.

The news of her father's end at Monte Carlo had intensified the melancholy of her thoughts. She had always hoped whilst he lived that some revelation, some atonement, might come from him.

He was dead; and death carries with it its own depression, its own hopelessness. Death in her father's case seemed to her intensified in horror, because it was the end of a base, valueless, miserable life. It filled her with the same sort of despair which Hurstmanceaux had felt on hearing that Cocky was dying at Staghurst.

Nothing could be undone; nothing could be atoned for; nothing could be explained: he was dead in a gambling place; and had left no message for her. The German consul had telegraphed to her that there had been no papers found anywhere except the official declarations of his birth and rank.

She had never expected anything, and yet now that he was dead, in unforgiving and unconfessing silence, she felt as if some added hoplessness settled down on her. She was still young in years, she had the kind of beauty which never wholly passes away, she had wealth, and she could have found many who would have willingly aided her to forget and make her life anew. But she had no wish to do so. She was proud, and she would not have returned to the world on sufferance, to be pointed out and whispered about. She preferred the sombre, mediæval

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loneliness of her Swabian solitude, where the household honored and the peasantry loved her. To them she was the Countess Olga zu Lynar, whom they had served and cherished and admired ever since she had been a young child riding through the forests and climbing up the braes. For them she was the daughter of their dear and revered lady; of Prince Khris they had known little. Their affection and respect were feudal; and if any stranger had said an injurious word of her in the woods round Schloss Lynar, he would have found a deep and a sure grave in the rushing waters of their mountain streams.

Here, if she did not find peace, she found what most resemble it: security, repose, and uninterrupted thought.

The death of her father rudely disturbed that calmness, because it awakened the passion and sorrows of the past as a single rifleshot would wake all the sleeping echoes of the hills and woods.

She sat beside the hearth, a boarhound stretched out in the warmth at her feet; the dull grey day seeming evening as its light came through the panes of the deep mullioned windows. Where she sat was the old Rittersaäl of the castle, with the armor, the shields, and the banners of a hundred forgotten battles ranged down the oaken walls. She had touched nothing. She had left it all as her grandfather had found and left it. It was gloomy, but she liked the gloom. It hurt her less than light and movement and modern luxuries, which were in such cruelly ironical mockery of her own sorrow.

As she sat thus, her long cloth fur-bordered skirts falling about her feet, and the fire light shining on her face, the dog sprang up with a loud rolling bark and rushed from the hall. She heard wheels on the rarely used and lonely drive, which passed round under the trees to the chief entrance on the other side of the house.

Who could it be? No one ever came there except some man of business. No doubt it was some consul, or some lawyer, come to speak of Prince Khristof's funeral, and be paid for it.

But she heard a voice say in the outer hall beyond in speaking to the dog:

"What Oscar, good Oscar, have you not forgotten?"

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The sound of the voice made her heart stand still.

It was eight long years since she had heard it. Was she sane? Was she in her senses? Did she only dream, awake, as she had so often dreamed in sleep all vainly?

She stood in the centre of the great dark hall and saw, as through a mist, a person enter. She saw him put back the servants with a gesture, she saw him turn and close the door and remain motionless, the dog leaping upon him; but she saw it all as in a cloud, as though many, many miles away, and she felt that it was only a vision which would fade and pass, like so many other visions of her lonely nights.

He who had entered hesitated still some moments; then he drew nearer.

"Olga," he said timidly: "Olga, can you forgive?"

She fell forward insensible into his outstretched arms.

She had dreamed vainly of reunion for so long; and at last the dream had come true.

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CHAPTER XLV.

"I'LL marry you, Wuffie," said Mouse, three days later as she walked along a secluded alley of the Casino gardens, whilst the sun sparkled on marble balustrades and glossy orange leaves. "No; pray spare me those ecstasies, and for goodness sake don't use German endearments; it sets my nerves on edge. Listen; there is a condition; perhaps you'll set your back up at it, and if you do I shall marry somebody else. *Il n'y a que l'embarras du choix.*"

She only cared for Woffram's consent because he was the only one amongst her adorers who could be brought with decent reason to accept Vanderlin's money; the only one also who combined the poverty which could be bought with the high rank which would conceal the sale.

Besides, he was, as she said, a very pretty boy, with a Cupidon's face and a grenadier's frame, and she thought that he would make *bon ménage*, *i.e.*, do exactly as he was told to do.

She knew society too well not to know that an English duchess is a really much greater person than a German Serenissime, but she was tired of being Duchess of Otterbourne on twopence-halfpenny a year, and being under tutelage and coercion; and there were one or two royal princesses whom she especially detested to whom it would be amusing to be cousin by marriage, she could scratch them so deftly with the softest of velvet paws.

On the whole, she thought it was the best thing to do, so she spoke coldly and rudely to the young prince as he walked beside her. It was the way she managed her men, and it had always succeeded—except once.

"Every wish of yours is law," said Prince Woffram, radiant and submissive, for he was extremely in love and had never seen any way of inducing his syren to accept his sword and his title, which were all he possessed in the world. She had always told him that he was a nice-looking boy and wore a pretty uniform, and might follow her

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about and carry her wraps, but was good for nothing more serious.

"Let us walk a little quicker, and don't keep kissing my hand. It is ridiculous," she said, with some acerbity, for when you are going to marry a man it is always best not to be too civil to him. "Now listen here. Your greatuncle Khris is dead. I was with him when he died. I persuaded him to do an act of very tardy justice to his daughter. I knew the whole story long ago, and that was why I went to see him. I wanted to try and persuade him to undo the harm he had done."

The young man was silent. He was surprised and could not grasp her meaning, for he knew that it must be something other than what her mere words expressed.

"You never knew Olga, did you?" he said, rather stupidly.

"No," said Mouse, keeping both hands in her muff. "I never knew her, but I have always pitied her profoundly, and I knew her wicked old father could set things right if he chose, for once he almost confessed as much to me. But all this does not matter to you. It is an old story, and they are now going to live happy ever afterwards like people in a fairy-tale. That is their idea of felicity; it wouldn't be mine. If you would believe it, that man has never cared about anybody else. It seems impossible, but it is so. I suppose men of business are not like other people."

"I don't understand," said the young prince humbly, and in great perplexity. "Who are going to live happily for ever? Who are you speaking of? Please tell me more."

"Nobody wants you to understand—you are to listen," said Mouse, with her brilliant eyes flashing on him above her sable collar. "I tell you I was with your greatuncle when he died, and he gave me his confession to take to Adrian Vanderlin, and the proof of the false witness which he had bribed people to bear against his daughter, because he was so angry that she did so little to get her husband's money for him (when you think of it, that was natural enough, for one don't give one's daughter into the *bourgeoise* without expecting to be paid for it). He played

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Iago's part, you know, and Vanderlin was jealous, and your cousin Olga was too proud to clear herself, and so they were made very miserable and separated. Well, this is what he did and what he confessed, and if I had not been there he would have had the papers burned, for he was a bad, vindictive old man to the last."

This she said with great sincerity and emphasis, for she saw in memory the glare of those steel-blue eyes in the yellow, drawn face.

"But why should you have been the intermediary?" asked the young man, bewildered. "Why did not poor old Khris send to my uncle Ernst (his nephew, you know), who has always remained a devoted friend of Olga's?"

"I don't know *why* he didn't. I know he did not," she replied irritably, for she was not disposed to submit to cross-examination, and she had by this time come to believe in her narrative as actual fact. "I was there; and he was mortally ill. I doubt if anyone else would have had patience to unravel his confused confessions."

"Well?" said the young prince anxiously.

"Well, I have done Vanderlin an enormous service," she continued. "That is to say, with his peculiar ideas of fidelity, he thinks it enormous. It is the 'one man one vote' theory, don't you know. 'One life, one love'—that sort of thing. One has read of it. Great bosh, but still—no, pray don't go on like that or you will bore me to extinction. Listen. You and I can't marry as we are. We are as poor as church mice. My people won't and your people can't do anything for us. But Vanderlin will."

"Vanderlin!" exclaimed Wuffie. He was dismayed and horrified; he was a young man of easy principles, but there are some scruples which women dance over like a stool at a cotillon, and which men jib at violently as their hunters do at brick walls.

"If your pater ordered you to marry a royal schoolgirl, you'd take her dower fast enough," she continued; "and yet what disgraceful sources it would come from—opium-taxes, and gin-palace-taxes, and dog-taxes, and poor men's sixpences and shillings, and nailmakers' and glassworkers' pennies, and real coinage, as one may say, out of vice and misery and want."

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"You can't be a republican—a socialist?" cried Prince Woffram in horror.

"I don't know whether I am or not. I dare say I may be. Anybody would be to see a little German princeling, with twopence-halfpenny a year, and whose granduncle has just died without money to pay his doctor's bill, giving himself airs as if he were somebody."

"How dreadfully unkind you are," murmured the young man.

"If you don't like home-truths, you can go and amuse yourself anywhere you like," she replied, in a severe tone, her hands folded inside her muff, and her coldest and most resolute expression on her face.

His heart sank into his boots. He walked on beside her, crestfallen and conquered.

"I was quite frank with Cocky beforehand, and I am quite frank with you. It is much the best way. There are no disappointments and no recriminations."

Prince Woffram did not reply. He did not care to fill the *rôle* which had suited Cocky so admirably, and he was, moreover, blindly in love with her. Men in love do not like to be mere lay-figures. But he was weak by disposition, and both his poverty and passion made him weaker still.

"Vanderlin will do whatever we wish," said Mouse sharply, with an accent of inflexible authority. "He is made of millions, as Boo says, and he is immensely grateful to me. He wants to give me half his fortune, but of course he can't give it to me, so I told him that I was going to marry you, and that he might give it you; quite secretly, you understand, and you will always consider that it is mine. That must be very distinctly understood."

The young man was silent; he was, indeed, overwhelmed with astonishment and confusion. It seemed odd to hear that another man had been told of her intention to marry him before he himself had been informed of his future happiness; moreover, there was something about the projected arrangement which struck jarringly on his not very sensitive conscience and appalled him, and his proposed benefactor had divorced a woman of his race!

He stammered some German phrases, embarrassed and

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apprehensive of her displeasure, for he was afraid of her, keenly and childishly afraid.

"Don't use that ridiculous language!" said Mouse, with a boundless scorn for the mother tongue of Goethe and of Kant. "Have you understood all I have been saying? If you accept what Vanderlin will do for us—and he will do a great deal—I will marry you. If you won't, I shall never see you any more. Pray make no mistake about that."

"But if you love me——"

"I never said I loved you. I don't love people. I like you in a way, and I will marry you on certain conditions, but I will not marry you, my good Wuffie, to live on an empty title and the pay of a German lieutenant of cuirassiers. Not if I know it! I won't even enter Germany, except for the month at Homburg when everybody's there. Thanks—I have seen your father's court, once in the duchy of Karstein-Lowenthal, and very often in the duchy of Gerolstein!"

She laughed cruelly, not relaxing her quick elastic step over the smooth gravel between the palms and the orange-trees. She intended to marry him, and she had no doubt whatever about the result of the conversation. Men were like horses. Ride them with a firm hand and you could put them at any timber you chose.

Prince Woffram's face flushed painfully; the jeer at his father's court hurt him. As far as he could feel offence with her he felt it then, as her clear unkind laughter rippled on the wintry air.

"You are very rough on me," he said, humbly, in English. "I am poor—we are poor—I know that; but honorable poverty——"

Mouse turned her face to him, withering scorn flashing from her sapphire eyes upon him.

"Honorable poverty has just died in the person of Prince Khristof of Karstein-Lowenthal, and he had not a penny to pay his laundress, and his lodging, and his doctor, and his grave! Adrian Vanderlin paid for all of them."

She said it cruelly, triumphantly, with her silvery laugh sounding shriller than usual.

The young man grew redder still with anger and shame

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commingled. His eyes were downcast. He had no reply ready as he walked beside her down the lonely alley.

She saw that she had wounded and offended him.

"Come, Wuffie, be reasonable," she said, in another tone. "You know well enough that I shall no more marry you to remain penniless than I shall marry one of the croupiers in the Casino. If you were going to ally yourself with a royal princess, you would see nothing degrading in living on her allowance allotted to her by what is called the State, that is, taken out of the taxes paid by the public on their sugar, and tea, and cheese, and clothing, and yet, when you come to analyze it, that is not very creditable. It is much more creditable to take what an immensely rich financier never will miss, and offers, *de bon cœur*, to acquit himself of a debt of gratitude; and since you are so fond of your family, he is your cousin by marriage—at least he was and he will be again, for he means to re-marry his lost angel. My dear Wuffie, pray don't mind my saying so, but German princes are living on their wives' dowers all over the world by the hundred. It is their *métier*."

He still did not answer. He looked on the ground as he walked. There was sufficient truth in what she said for his national and family pride to wince under it. He knew that if he looked at her he should consent to this abominable, indefensible, unworthy act to which she tempted him. He kept his eyes on the ground; the color burnt hotly in his cheeks. She was silent too a few moments. Then she stopped short in her walk, forcing him to stop also, and faced him, her hands in her muff and her face very resolute and insolent, with a contemptuous smile on her lips.

"My dear Wuffie," she said with sovereign contempt, "you can't suppose that I was going to marry you for yourself, do you?"

The young man colored, much mortified. He had supposed so.

"You are a very pretty boy, but one doesn't marry for good looks," she said in the same tone. "One marries for bread and butter. Neither you nor I have got it; but together we can get it."

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"But—but——" stammered Prince Woffram; he knew that he was being tempted to what was disgraceful; to what, judged by any court of honor, would brand him as unworthy to wear his sword.

"Can you really think, my dear boy," she said with a cruel, slighting little laugh, "that I shall marry you for the mere sake of going, as the wife of the sixth son of a six-hundredth-time-removed cousin of the emperor, in the *défiler-cour* at Berlin? I can assure you that such a prospect would not attract me for a moment. I have no desire to figure in the Salle once in ten years, and make jam and knit stockings like a true German fürstin all the rest of my life. '*Kuche, kirche, kinder*,' was not said by your Imperial relative of me. If you accept my conditions I will become your wife, but if you do not there are many others who will. I like you very much, Wuffie, but I can live extremely well without you, my dear boy."

He strove to keep his eyes away from her face. He looked at the trees, at the clouds, at the sea, then at the ground again. He knew that he was being led to his own undoing, to his disgrace in his own eyes, to the abandonment of self-respect and independence and manhood; he knew that he would become Vanderlin's pensioner and her slave, that he would fall in his own sight to a lower place than was held by one of the croupiers raking in gold at the tables yonder. He tried to keep his eyes from her face. He had had a pious mother; he prayed for strength.

"Look at me, Wuffie!" she said imperiously.

The delicate scent of the perfumed muff was wafted to his nostrils like a puff of incense from the altars of the Venusberg. He lifted his eyes and saw hers, with their challenge, their mockery, their malice, their command. He was lost.

A few minutes later Boo, who had been playing near, ran down the alley at a headlong pace toward them, and lifted her rosebud mouth to be kissed.

"You are going to be my new pappy, Wuffie!" she said, in her sweetest and most innocent manner. "I've had two; but they're both dead, and I shall like you the best of the three, because you're so pretty, Wuffie."

And she sprang up into his arms, and laughed and beat

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him about the eyes with a bunch of violets, and so dazzled and blinded him that he had no time to ask himself—who had been the *two* of whom she spoke?

Jack had a letter a month later which astonished and annoyed him. He read it sitting in a favorite nook in one of the embrasures of the hall windows at Faldon, with dogs between his knees, at his feet, under his arms, and behind his back; young frolicsome foolish dogs, big and little, who were the object of Ossian's deepest scorn.

The letter was from Boo, and dated from a fashionable hotel in the Rue Castiglione.

"*Mammy says you are to come over,*" *the note began abruptly.* "*She's writing to your gardjens. She is going to marry Wuffie. Wuffie is nicer than anybody as was before. He has such a beautiful white coat, and is all chaines, and orders, and swords that clatter, that is when he puts 'em on; when they're off he don't look more nor any other man; but she means to make him give up soldiering. She says you are to come over. You won't carry her traine 'cos people as are widders don't have traines when they marry, and besides you're too old. But that don't matter. I shall have a beautiful frock and Wuffie has gived me a tuckoiss belt. Don't fret about your dress. They'll dress you here. It's on the third. Mammy sends you one hundred thousand kisses; me too. Au revoir. Auf weidersehn.*"

For Boo, a true daughter of her time, could write correctly all languages except her own.

This letter was painful to its recipient. He sat looking gloomily out at the glades of the park where wild winds from St. George's Channel were swaying the great trees and driving the Faldon river into scurrying clouds of brown foam.

"I'll take it to him," he thought. He had learned to know that his uncle Ronnie was a rock of refuge. He got up as well as he could for being embraced by all his dogs at once, and knocked down by a Newfoundland twice in excess of adoration.

He found Hurstmanceaux at the other end of the house engaged in reading his own correspondence of the morning.

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"If you please is this true?"

"Is what true?"

"That my mother is to marry."

He held out his sister's letter.

"I don't know if it means that. If it don't mean that I can't tell what it means," he added despondently.

"Your mother marries, yes," said Hurstmanceaux, taking the note, "and this letter says you are to go to Paris. Do you wish to go?"

Jack's fair face grew almost stern.

"I will never go to her," he said with more decision than could have been expected from his years.

"Make no rash vows, my boy," said Ronald. "But as regards your appearance at this marriage it is not necessary; I think you are right not to go."

"I would not go if they dragged me with ropes through the sea from Dublin Bay to Calais," said Jack; "and up the Seine," he added with a geographical afterthought.

"She killed him, and she has forgotten him," thought her son as he went out with his dogs into the bare March avenues of the park. Jack did not forget.

So it came to pass that at the brilliant wedding celebrated at the English and German embassies, and attended by many great persons of royal and noble families, there was not present either the eldest brother or the eldest son of the lady who became H.S.H. Princess Woffram of Karstein-Lowenthal.

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CHAPTER XLVI.

In the following autumn Margaret Massarene caught cold. It was a slight ailment at first, and if she had been the woman she had been in North Dakota she would have soon thrown off the chill. But she had experienced in her own person the perils with which she had once said her William was menaced—her love of the good things of the table had affected her liver and her digestive organs. She had never stinted herself, as she had expressed it; indeed, she had overeaten herself continually ever since that first wondrous day when her man had said to her: "The pile's made, old woman; we'll go home and spend it."

All the guinea-fowls, and pheasants, and oysters, and turtle, and anchovies, and capons, and grouse, and prawns, and whitebait which had been immolated on the altar of her appetite, had their posthumous vengeance. Richemont, who had loathed her, had helped with his exquisite inventions to hasten her undoing. She was naturally very strong and of good constitution, but the incessant eating which prevails in England, and which kills nine-tenths of its gentle people, had been too much for her. Annual visits to German baths, to Carlsbad, and to Vichy had warded off the evil, but could not wholly avert it. When she got cold, the over-tasked liver and the failing gastric juices struck work; the lungs were already feeble; and before a month was over, after she had felt a chill as she came from church, she was declared by her attendant physicians to be beyond their aid.

She had always been a meek and patient woman, accepting whatever came to her, the bitter with the sweet, and she did not rebel now, though the loss of life was hard to her.

"Just when I was in the straw-yard, as it were. Comfortable, like an old horse as is past work and has had a good owner, not as many on 'em has," she murmured. It seemed an unkind disposition of Providence. "But

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there! we don't know what's best for us!" she said, with that submissive obedience to the frown of fate which she had shown so long to the scowl of William Massarene. Her daughter was more sad than she.

"If I had only really loved her once for five minutes!" she thought. But she had not. She had never felt a single thrill of those affections of which the world is, or affects to be, so full.

She was devotion itself in attendance on her mother—watched by her night and day, and addressed her with exquisite gentleness. But it was pity, sorrow, compassion, regret, all other kind and tender emotions which moved her, but amongst them there was no love. All the other gods will come if called, but not love in any of his guises.

"Don't ye try to feign what you don't feel," said Margaret Massarene. "You've no feigning in you, my dear, and why should you try? You was took away from me when you were a little thing of five, and you was always kept away to be made a lady of (and that they *did*). It stood to reason, as when you see me all them years after, you couldn't have no feeling for me. I was nought to you but a stranger, and I saw as my way of talk hurt you."

Katherine wept, leaning her head down on her mother's broad, pallid hand.

"Don't ye fret, Kathleen! Why should you fret?" said the sick woman. "You have nothin' to blame yourself for—toward me, at any rate. I did think as 'twas your duty to respect your father more in his life, and to keep his great work together when he was gone. But there! you'd your own way of lookin' at things, and you're not to be blamed for that."

Then her weak voice failed her, and she lay looking out, through the branches of an acacia-tree beyond the window, to the silvery line of the sea.

"I did according to my light, mother," said Katherine in a whisper. "I may have been in error."

"Ay, my dear," said Margaret; "that's what all you clever, eddicated people do. You make a law for yourselves, and then you say you follow it!"

It might be so.

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What had seemed the voice of conscience might have been the voice of vanity. She could not tell. Perhaps this poor, simple, vulgar woman had been more in the right than she.

Some hours passed; one physician remained in the house, another came and went; nothing was to be done. The human machine was worn out; it had been ill-fed too long and then over-fed; its delicate and intricate mechanism rebelled, waxed feeble, gave way altogether.

"I'd hev liked another ten years of it," she said regretfully. "'Twas a holiday like, the nice easy life. And you won't ever know, my dear, how hard I worked—over there."

Then she cried feebly but sadly, thinking of those wearing and cruel days in Dakota, in burning heat and freezing cold, when she had worked so hard, and of this pleasant "lady's life" which she had now to leave, which had come too late to do much more than cause her such regret. Katherine's head was bowed down upon the bed.

"And you had no reward!"

"Oh, yes, my dear, I *had* my reward! Don't ever go for to say otherwise! I see your father a great man and shaken by the hand by princes and honored by everybody—except you." Then her mind wandered a little, and she said many things about her man's renown, and his virtues, and his attainments, and the height to which he had risen. "Princes at his own table," she murmured. "In his life and his death they honored him. Look at his grave, piled up with flowers—nothin' in the Abbey ever grander."

Once she raised herself on her elbow and took hold of her daughter's arm.

"Look you, child—divorce is as easy got out there as berries in the fields in summer; a rich man can put away his wife like an old glove, and he never did that—never! I was an eyesore to him, but he kept me by him, and he had me dressed and served like a queen. He was a God-fearing man, was William."

All her memory was of him, of the brute who had scarcely ever thrown her a kind word in all the forty years that she had dwelt beside him.

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"He was a great man, a very great man, was your father," she repeated. "He'd have died a peer, and I dare say a minister too, if that shot hadn't killed him on his threshold."

Her mind was little with her living daughter beside her; it was almost entirely with the dead man who, when they had both been young, had stepped out beside her through the green grass of Kilrathy to conquer the world—and had done it.

"He was a great man, was William," she said as she closed her eyes. She looked at her worn fingers, on which the flesh hung in folds, and turned the plain brass wedding ring feebly round and round; the ring that was now covered by a diamond guard.

"'Twas a fine mornin' as he put it there," she murmured. "The sun was shinin' and the dew sparklin', and I mind me of a little tit as sat on a wild bit o' sweetbriar against the church door. 'Tis a sweet feelin', Kathleen, when ye gives yerself for a man for good. But ye don't care about them feelin's. You're too high and too cold."

"Oh, not cold! Oh, mother—no, not cold!"

"Well, you're somethin' as comes to the same thing," said Margaret wearily, and lay still. The light of the intellect must always seem cold as Arctic light to those who only know the mellow warmth of the sunshine of the heart.

Her daughter remained leaning against the bed upon her knees. She felt as if so much atonement were due from her, and yet——? Perhaps she should have remembered more the excuse which lay in society for the faults of her father.

Society says to the successful man: "You have done well and wisely; you have thought of yourself alone from your cradle." Society offers the premium of its flattery and its rewards to the man who succeeds, without regard to the means he has employed. Provided he avoids scandals which become public, there would be obvious impertinence in any investigation into his methods. Society is only occupied with the results. When he succeeds his qualities become virtues, as when a vine bears fruit the chemicals which it has absorbed during its cul-

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ture become grapes. Public subscriptions will become accreditated to him as divine charities; if he write his name down for a large sum at a banquet at which a royal duke or a lord mayor presides, to enrich a hospital or endow an asylum, he need fear no demands as to how he has gained his vast capital. The man who succeeds knows that his sins will be ignored because he has acquired greatly, as hers were forgiven to Mary Magdalene because she had loved greatly. Can we blame a man because his morality is not higher than that of the world in general? "Get money, honestly if you can, but get money," says society, and when he has got it, if it has been got in quantities sufficiently large, sovereigns and princes will visit him and require nothing more from him than the fact and proof of its possession. Her father had not created the worship of the golden calf; he had only availed himself of it; he had only set up the animal in his own kailyard and opened his gates.

Great qualities he had undoubtedly possessed; if they were not lovable or altruistic, or such as pleased the strict moralist or the poetic philanthropist, they were such as are alone appreciated in an age which would send the Nazarene to a treadmill and the Stagyrite to a *maison centrale* if they were living now.

Had she done wrong not to value them more? No; she could not think so.

"He was a great man, my dear, and he had a right to do as he liked with his own," her mother murmured again, faithful to the last, like a dog, to the hand which, though it had struck her many a brutal blow, had been her master's.

"He was a great man, was William," she said again; and then her mind wandered away to the green wet pastures of Kilrathy, and she thought she was a dairy-girl again with bare feet and kilted skirt, and she called the cows to the milking: "Come, my pretties, come—Blossom and Bell and Buttercup. Come; 'tis time." Then her hands moved feebly, as though they pulled the udders, and she smiled a little and would have laughed, but she had no strength. "I'm home again," she murmured; and then life left her.

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CHAPTER XLVII.

It was a gusty, wild, and cloudy morning at Faldon some days later, and Hurstmanceaux sat in his library reading a communication which he had received from the head of the Government. The epistle, which was written by the premier himself, offered him the governorship of a very important colony. The letter was extremely complimentary, and there was no possible reason to doubt its sincerity. It urged upon him the sacrifice of his independence to the welfare of his country, and hinted that as years passed on it became time to abandon certain eccentricities of opinion and habits of isolation. Hurstmanceaux read it with the attention which the position of its writer demanded; but he did not waste many minutes in its consideration. It was not the first time that such offers had been pressed on him. The independence of his character was so well known, and his principles so much respected by all men, that his accession to the governing ranks would have been an increase of strength to those who were in office. But they had never been able to tempt him to forsake private for public life. He now wrote a very courteous but most decided refusal, expressing his sense of the compliment paid to him, sealed it with his signet ring, and sat still awhile at his writing-table thinking.

"I have never yet been in the scramble for the loaves and fishes," he said to himself, "and I shall not begin now. He will find men enough and to spare who have outrun the constable, or who want handles to their names, and who will be delighted to go to the nether world and play at pseudo-sovereignty. Faldon and my other poor places are kingdoms enough for me, small ones though they be; and Jack's active mind is colony enough to cultivate."

Whatever else Jack might be, he was half a Courcy, and must be brought up to be a man and a gentleman.

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At that moment Jack came in followed by his dogs of all sizes, on whom Ossian, lying in a reading-chair, opened a contemptuous eye; Jack had permission to run free of the library as he liked. He had now a morning paper in his hand which he held out to his uncle.

"Mr. Adeane wishes me to ask you, please, if this is true," he said, pointing to a paragraph marked by his tutor.

Hurstmanceaux glanced at it. It announced his acceptance of the Australian governorship. His brows contracted in displeasure. "Nothing could be less true," he answered. "It is true that the appointment has been offered to me. But tell Adeane I decline it. Leave the paper here, dear. I will send a contradiction."

Jack went out by one of the windows opening on a terrace as he had entered, his canine courtiers leaping about him, and Hurstmanceaux took up the journal to see the date of the paragraph.

It was a journal of fashion and politics; the statement which concerned him was in a column containing other items of news; the name in one of these caught his eye; he read that the wife of William Massarene was dead at her villa at Bournemouth.

When Katherine Massarene closed her mother's eyes she felt both regret and remorse. Why had she not had patience and penetration enough to do justice to the unrecognized loyalty and affection in that existence of which he had only seen the envelope of flesh, only despised the narrowness and ignorance? She knew that she had never loved her mother; she felt that she must have often, very often, caused her pain and humiliation. She had persistently gazed at her mother's foolishness and commonness; she had never tried to be just to her better qualities.

Fine temperaments are always cruelly open to such self-reproach; she never ceased to blame her own heartlessness, and when she followed her only relative to the grave she said to herself, with exaggerated self-censure, that she had rolled more than one stone to her mother's cairn.

She had indeed been indulgent, submissive, kind beyond

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that which many would have thought incumbent upon her, but she forgot that she had been so; she only remembered her own lack of feeling, her own intolerance and antagonism, her own contemptuous isolation; all which had seemed as cold as Greenland ice to the poor dead woman.

As regarded her own future she had made no plans. She would have liked to take charge of the children's orphanage which she had founded in her mother's name in County Down; but she thought to do so would look as if she had been making a refuge for herself in creating the institution. She wished to gain her own living, without favor, simply by means of her head or her hands. She inclined toward music; she was enough of an artist to make her mark in it; but the publicity necessitated would, she knew, be very distasteful to her. For the moment she decided nothing, but when she had buried her mother in the crypt of Vale Royal, according to her last request, she returned to the house at Bournemouth to pass there the few months during which it was still her own. The Roxhalls had entreated her to remain with them, but she felt an imperative longing for solitude.

"You are much too young to live alone," said Roxhall to her.

"I feel a hundred years old," she answered.

A great weight of what seemed to her unending regret lay like lead on her life. She was the more unhappy because happiness had been offered to her, and she had been obliged to refuse it, or had thought herself to be so obliged. It would have been happiness, great and wondrous happiness, but she tried not to think of it, lest the memory of what might have been should entirely unnerve her for the combat of her life to come. For one thing she was thankful—people had by this time quite ceased to talk about her. Only a few old friends like the Framlinghams and Lady Mary Altringham wrote to her. Nothing is easier than to drop out of people's recollection if you wish it; nor is it difficult if you don't.

She was a great deal on the sea and by the sea, and passed much of her time when on shore in the pine-wood

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which belonged to the grounds. It was sheltered, and no one ever intruded there; and to Argus it was a sylvan paradise.

A day or two after her mother's funeral she was seated on the same bench where Framlingham and Hurstmanceaux had found her in an earlier time. She was reading a letter from one of the poor people whom she had raised from grinding misery in the States. It was a true and tender letter, none the less welcome because ill-writ and ill-spelt. Sometimes these rude letters have more eloquence in them than lies in Bossuet or John Newman.

She read it twice, being touched by it, then laid it down on the bench and looked out seaward.

It was a November day, but still and bright. In the west, beyond the heaving expanse of grey water, the sun was going in rosy mists to his setting; the outline of a great liner was black against the horizon; midway in the Channel there were some fishing-boats, trawlers, who had put up lights betimes at their mastheads. Her face looked very colorless as she sat there, the deep dull black of her dress made her skin look like snow itself, and her ungloved hands, as they rested on her lap, might have been the sculptured hands carved on the marble breast of some recumbent figure in a crypt.

"I have often wished to be alone and free," she thought. "I have my wish." And like most wishes in their fulfilment, this wish of hers was not very sweet.

"May I speak to you?" said a man's voice, which thrilled through the innermost nerves of her being.

Instinctively she rose. Hurstmanceaux was standing as he had stood six months before; he had his face to the sunset; its light shone in his blue eyes; he uncovered his head; he did not touch her hand.

"I have come from Faldon to see you," he said. "I read of your mother's death."

She was silent; she had no idea what to say in answer.

"Did she suffer?"

"No; happily, not much."

"You buried her at Vale Royal?"

"Yes; your cousin Roxhall gave permission."

"Of course!"

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Then silence ensued between them. The dog stood looking from one to another; the sun sank down beyond the edge of the far sea.

"I came to speak to you," said Hurstmanceaux with an effort. "I left you in anger and offence, and you had answered me, I think, in too great haste."

"Oh, no——"

"Pardon me; hear me to the end. I have thought of little else since we parted. I have not left Faldon. I have seen scarcely anyone, except my little nephew and his tutor. I have had full time for reflection. Well, what I come to say to you is this. Between you and me there ought not to come, there ought not to exist, any unworthy misunderstandings born of doubt, or temper, or suspicion. Such are unworthy of us both."

"There was no misunderstanding."

"I think there was. You chose to conceive that I desired what I should regret if I obtained it, and I was too much in haste and in anger to prove to you your error. One does not persuade angels to bless one's life, unless one wrestles with them. I took you by surprise. Perhaps I spoke like a coxcomb in too great security. I should have remembered that all you had ever seen in me had been intolerable rudeness. I should have sued you more humbly——"

"Oh, how can you say such things?"

"I say the truth. I was too rough, too rash, too confident. I want you to forget that: to only remember that in all I said I was entirely sincere, and that in all you objected in answer you were entirely wrong—absolutely and utterly mistaken. I once more offer you my name, my heart, my life. No man can do more. I earnestly entreat you not to let the world's conventionalities or your own imaginations part us."

She was profoundly moved by the words; she could not doubt their truth or their loyalty. Incredible as it seemed to her, it was clear that this sentiment which had brought him hither twice was one both deep and lasting. But she could not and would not allow herself to be persuaded to his hurt.

"What did my poor mother say on her deathbed?

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They sent me away from her to be '*made* a lady of.' Lord Hurstmanceaux, your wife must be one born, not made."

He was silent; he was the most truthful of men and he believed intensely in race.

"Listen to me," he said at last. "I should be false to the tenets of my life if I denied the influence of race. But there are exceptions to all laws. There are beggars whom a Burleigh fitly mates with; that is, I think, for Burleigh himself to judge. She cannot judge because, like all generous persons, if she had the casting vote, she would vote against herself. Let me speak for once, and only for once, of a subject which is to me intolerable pain and shame. My sister, my best beloved sister, who is thoroughbred in every pulse of her blood and every fibre of her being, dropped to the level of a courtezan for sake of money. She was—there can be no doubt of it—your father's mistress; of details I know nothing, but the fact is beyond doubt."

She tried to silence him.

"Oh, why—oh, why distress yourself thus? He is dead—she is married again——"

"Those circumstances alter nothing. The fact must have been—what I say. You yourself must have learnt or concluded it from his papers."

She made no reply. She could not deny what was obvious.

"Now," said Hurstmanceaux, and his face was white with pain as he spoke, "race did not keep unsoiled in her either our name or her own womanhood. I believe that you would keep both my honor and your own immaculate. If you could care for me, do not let apprehensions and doubts and mistrust divide our lives. I love you; is love so strange a word to you that you cannot even guess what it wishes and suffers?"

His eyes rested on hers as he spoke. It seemed as if a blaze of unbearable light inundated her soul.

"You love *me!*" she said in a hushed voice of great amaze.

"I love you. What is there so strange in that? I told you so six months ago."

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She threw her arm round a young pine stem near her, and, leaning her forehead on its rough bark, burst into tears.

"Lead me, guide me, take me if you will," she said brokenly. "I have trusted to my own wisdom, and perhaps I have always done wrong."

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CHAPTER XLVIII.

THE château of Les Mouettes was lent for the coming winter season to the Prince and Princess Woffram of Karstein by its owners, who, both naturally generous, and made more generous still by happiness and a sense of gratitude, were unceasing and inexhaustible in the wideness of their goodwill. It was always well to oblige persons who are led away by their feelings, thought the recipient of their bounties. Such people do not inquire too minutely or measure too exactly. It is of such as these that is made that succulent oyster which the wise man or woman opens with his or her knife, and sucks the juices thereof.

Mouse had fully persuaded herself that she had done an admirable action. She had made two people happy; if their happiness were idiotic, and to her incomprehensible, it was none the less to them what their hearts desired: no one can account for the tastes of others.

She really admired herself and quite succeeded in forgetting whatever there might have been a little questionable or a little disagreeable to explain about her visit to Prince Khris on his deathbed. The documents had all been quite genuine; if she had embroidered a little on the plain facts of how she had obtained them, that mattered to nobody. Neither Vanderlin nor Olga ever doubted her narrative, and their gratitude toward her found incessant expression. If Prince Woffram doubted it he never said so. He had accepted its resuts, and his lips were sealed.

She was standing on the sea-wall of the Mouettes on a bright and balmy morning, looking herself as radiant as the morning, with a great bunch of tea-roses at her breast, and a gold-headed cane in her hand, when Daddy Gwyllian, who was staying at Cannes, came to her from the garden side of the sea-terrace.

He was looking brimful of news and of amazement; a white cashmere neckerchief was wound about his throat;

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he was wearing a fur coat and little bunch of fresias at the buttonhole of it; he was visibly agitated.

"My dear Princess!" he said, pressing her hands and quite forgetting that he disliked her. "What you must suffer! How I sympathize! Who could ever have thought it! A man of such sense! Perhaps if you had not left England it would not have happened!"

"What on earth is the matter, Daddy?" asked Mouse, astonished and curious. "Have you come to bring me bad news?"

"*You ask me!*" cried Daddy in amaze; then dropping his voice to a sepulchral moan, he added, "Is it possible —possible—that you have not heard of your brother's fatal act?"

Over her face a cold and angry shadow passed.

"Has he killed himself?" she asked. "I don't think he'd ever do anything half so agreeable to others."

Daddy Gwyllian drew a long breath.

"I am really grieved to be the bearer of such tidings," he said, with the very kneenest relish in telling them. "But Ronnie—stay—you know that the Massarene woman gave all that immense fortune away to the poor?"

"Yes," said Mouse impatiently. "I saw all that rubbish in the papers long ago. What has that to do with Hurstmanceaux?"

"He has married her!" ejaculated Daddy. "Now!—now!—when she hasn't got a penny! Oh, Lord!"

"What!" she cried in turn, as she rose impetuously and stared at him.

"My dear lady! You may well be incredulous. It does seem impossible that any man in his senses—— But he married her yesterday, down at Bournemouth."

"You foolish old gossip!" she cried, with a concentrated fury, which almost stifled her voice. "Can you think of nothing better than to frighten one with such preposterous inventions? My brother would never even look at that creature."

"I may be an old gossip, Princess," said Daddy, with high offence and some dignity, "but I do not consciously say what is not true. Will you do me the honor to read this?"

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He fumbled beneath his fur coat, his paletot, and his morning coat, and brought out a telegram, which he handed to her. It was dated from Bournemouth, and addressed to Daddy himself.

"*You often counselled me to marry the daughter of Mr. Massarene. I am happy to inform you that I have done so this morning. The ceremony was private: Alberic Orme officiated.*"

It was signed—"Hurstmanceaux."

She read the lines in a single glance.

"You advised him? You advised him to disgrace us like this!" she cried with a furious gesture, crushing the dispatch in her hand, whilst her azure eyes poured their lightning upon him.

"I advised him to do so when the young woman was rich. You sent her down to Bedlowes yourself on purpose to bring it about. Perhaps, if you had not shown your hand so openly, he might have done it when it would have been a desirable thing to do. But I am a foolish old gossip, and I will leave you to digest—er—this extremely unpleasant fact. I have the honor to wish you good morning."

He took himself off, very huffed, stiff, and alienated; he had repossessed himself of his telegram.

Mouse stood still, convulsed with an inward fury, for which there was no possible outward expression. She was stunned.

He had done it on purpose, she was convinced! On purpose to outrage her!

"Wherever I meet them first," she said between her teeth: "if it be at a Drawing-room—I will cut them both dead!"

"What is the matter, Sourisette?" asked one of her women friends who was staying with her and approached as Daddy withdrew.

"You may well ask me. My brother has married the lowest of low women!"

"How very dreadful for you!" said the lady with sympathy. "But are you quite sure? Because when I came

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away from England last week they said he was going to marry Miss Massarene, the daughter of your good old friend Billy."

Mouse shuddered within herself. She could not hear the name of William Massarene without a spasm of unbearable remembrance, and she felt that her attitude of hostility was difficult to explain.

"He has married her. That is just the horror of it!" she said between her teeth. "You know what they all were, the lowest of the low. As acquaintances while they had their money, they were all very well; but as a connection—it is too frightful! I will never speak to her—never, never, not if I meet her at Osborne or Windsor."

A servant at that moment brought her telegrams from Carrie Wisbeach, and various other members of her family, all repeating the news and reflecting her own views with regard to it.

Such a *mésalliance!* If the money had been there it would have been a most admirable alliance, a most suitable arrangement, a most excellent choice; but when the money was all gone back to the poor from whom it had been extracted originally, the union was positively monstrous. If he had married a pauper out of the county workhouse, it would have been less insult to them; so they all agreed.

There is a kind of cynical frankness about "good society," with regard to its love of money, which is, perhaps, the only candid thing about it. It sticks like a swarm of bees where money is, and it vanishes like locusts before the north wind where it is not.

All the family and all the connections of Hurstmanceaux viewed his marriage as she viewed it. If he had blown his brains out they would have been less shocked, for they would have been able to say that he had had an accident with a revolver or a repeating-rifle. But it was impossible for them to explain away this act of insanity; and though he would probably live down in the country, as people should do who are ashamed of themselves, still, some time or other they would have to meet him, and they felt uncomfortably certain that the head of their house would compel from them respect and deference toward his wife.

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Even those few friends who were sincerely attached to him felt, like Daddy Gwyllian, that they could not venture to apologize for a man who had shown such culpable indifference to his own interests and the world's opinion.

"What has disturbed you, my heart's dearest?" said Prince Woffram as he came on to the terrace on his return from a golfing match; he had met Daddy Gwyllian a mile from the entrance gate, who had driven past him merely touching his hat.

"What has disturbed you?" he continued. "Did that pleasant little old gentleman come to bring you any ill news?"

Her answer was to throw the telegrams into his hands; from them he gleaned some idea of what had passed.

"Your brother marries? Well, what does that matter?"

"What?" she echoed, her eyes shining and flashing with fury. "If he had married a woman off the pavement of the Haymarket he could not have disgraced us more utterly! And for Alberic Orme to countenance such a disgrace! What an infamy!"

The young man raised his eyebrows and played with the tea-roses of the balustrade. The placidity of his temper opposed itself to the violence of hers like a marble breakwater to the fretting fury of a Venetian lagoon in December.

"She will have my eldest son with her to poison his mind against me!" she added, tears of genuine rage and grief overflowing her lovely eyes. "Have they not even taken away my only daughter from my guardianship?"

The young man was silent; he was not grieved that his friend Boo had been removed to England.

"He has married her merely to pass this insult on me!" she said with tears which burnt her eyes like fire.

"That is scarcely probable, my beloved," said Prince Woffram gently; "the lady is not noble, it is true; but then you have great license in these matters in Great Britain. Your Heralds' Office is practically a box of puppets."

"I cannot see," he repeated, "why you should be thus

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affected. The lady was much admired in London; she had great musical talent. I remember my cousins——"

"Great musical talent!" echoed Mouse bitterly. "Whilst she had her money, of course, they gave her every talent under heaven!"

She heard in memory the harsh, rude voice of Massarene saying of her own songs:

"She says yours is bad amatoor music, my lady!"

Oh, how she hated the creature! And to think she was now mistress of Faldon!

Katherine Massarene mistress of Faldon! It seemed to her an outrage too intolerable to be borne!

She had never cared to go to Faldon since the time of her marriage to Cocky; she had always railed against it as the dullest, wildest, and most out-of-the-way place upon earth. She would have perished of *ennui* if she had been forced to pass a week there between its ancient woods and its solitary seas; but for all that it was the cradle of her race, the home of her childhood, the house of her mother. To think of "Billy's daughter" as reigning there was an utterly unendurable insult! And the bust by Dalou and the portrait by Orchardson were no doubt gone there already, and were impudently taking their place in the gallery where the women of her race were portrayed and where her own portrait as a child, painted by Millais, hung in the light of the setting sun!

"I cannot see what it matters," repeated Prince Woffram, turning a telescope placed on the balustrade above the tea-roses on to a distant passing yacht.

He had become a very philosophic young man since his marriage.

The quiet common sense of the words fell like mild rain on the raging fires of her fierce indignation. Perhaps he was right and it did not matter. Perhaps he was more right than he knew and it was even advantageous.

If Katherine Massarene had not talked before of what she had found in her father's papers she certainly would not talk now. Shameful as Ronnie's conduct was, he would not allow his wife to expose his sister. It was a frightful *mésalliance*, but it had its serviceable side. A padlock was on the lips of "Billy's daughter."

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"I will never speak to her if I meet her at Osborne or Windsor," she repeated suddenly.

Prince Woffram looked round from the telescope and the tea-roses.

"My angel," he said very gently, "that would be to argue yourself unused to royal circles, and it would bring down on you many—many—oh! many questions."

"You would have me make advances to this beggared wretch—this scum of the earth!"

"No, no," said Prince Woffram soothingly. "I would not suggest to you to make advances. To make advances is to put oneself in the wrong. I would suggest to you to await events; and, in the not very probable coincidence which you imagine, I would beg you to remember that a great sovereign's invitation confers a credential which none can dispute."

Since he had trampled on his conscience, as he had put away his sword, Wuffie had substituted for them much practical common sense, and in very bland sentences said things which smote edgeways. His wife at times wondered how much he guessed, how far he was blinded, and now and then felt a spasm of fear that this cherub-faced boy, with his artless, meaningless smile, might, in some things, prove her master.

It is dangerous to teach a man, and a very young man, to sell his soul. Nature will substitute something else for it, something which you will not like when you learn to know it well.

She felt that he had fully determined on two things: one, that he would be well paid; the other, that he would not be compromised. So when she went into the house she tore up the various infuriated telegrams she had written in answer to her correspondents, and wrote instead some prettily-worded intimations that, as she had counseled her brother to make this marriage when the lady was rich, she could not blame him for making it now the same lady was poor, and could only hope that the result would be as fortunate as she sincerely desired for them both, though circumstances had arisen which unhappily estranged her from Hurstmanceaux. This way of looking at the matter was at once so angelic, and so nice and

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temperate, that it suggested an idea, which gradually filtered down through her intimate correspondents and permeated society, the impression, vague but general, that William Massarene's daughter had jockeyed her out of some portion of William Massarene's fortune. No one could explain how, but every one thought so. Daddy Gwyllian did indeed stoutly declare that the impression was preposterous and untenable, and that if Hurstmanceaux had broken all relations with his sister he had doubtless very sound reasons for doing so. But Daddy was waxing old and society was getting tired of him. When people live too long they outstay the welcome of the world.

With May Harrenden House was again open. The falconer of Clodion leaned and laughed in silent mirth as the throngs of society passed up the staircase under his gaze. The Massarenes were like Malbrouck, *morts et enterrés*, and an Australian wool-stapler reigned in their stead, worshipped where they had worshipped, and was guarded by their lares and pénates. Across the threshold, where William Massarene had been carried lifeless, the great world he had loved flocked, as the water-fowl on the ponds of the Green Park flock with equal avidity to be fed, no matter what hand it may be which scatters the bread.

Up that well-known staircase, under the eyes of the nude falconer, there came a beautiful and very fair woman, who had often been up those stairs before; a fair and slim and ever blandly-smiling youth was by her side, who had been told, as children are told in the nursery, to shut his eyes and open his mouth, and who had done so. He had been rewarded, for a great many good things had dropped into his mouth. England had become for him what it is for so many other German princelings, the Canaan overflowing with milk and honey where he could enjoy himself at other people's expense, and lead the first flight on other people's horses. She looked about her as she passed on through the reception-rooms: nothing was changed,

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nothing of any importance, and she herself not very much. There were still the same florid Pietro di Cortona high overhead in the effulgence of the electric lamps, still the same too dark and dubious Mantegna hanging above a pyramid of Calla lilies and damask roses. There were only no longer in the alcove where they had been enshrined the bust by Dalou and the portrait by Orchardson: they were at Faldon! Insupportable as this idea was to her, the outrage had its silver side; it meant silence, entire, absolute, on the part of her brother's wife.

"Billy—you brute!—I have been stronger than you!" she thought as she passed the place where the gold vase of Leo the Tenth still filled the humble office of a samovàr. Life had once more become easy and agreeable to her. Death had been discriminating and Fortune on the whole not unkind.

"The poor Massarenes were such dear good friends of mine, but you have so much more taste than they had," she said to the Australian wool-stapler.

And he, a big burly heavy man, who owned many millions of sheep on many thousands of pastures, and had as much taste as one of his wooly wethers, was flattered, and thrust out his big paunch, and thought to himself, under the sorcery of her smile, why should he not succeed wherever William Massarene had succeeded?

Why not indeed?

THE END.

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A Few Press Opinions on

A Living Lie

BY PAUL BOURGET

12mo, Cloth, $1.25; Paper Covers, 50 cents.

Scotsman

Mr. de Vallieres' translation leaves nothing to be desired, and deserves the thanks of English readers for having rendered accessible to them a masterpiece of minute analysis of character and feeling.

Pall Mall Gazette

M. Bourget's celebrated novel. . . . It is good to find a translation of a popular French novel so well done as this is, and the vivid picture of Parisian life loses nothing of its force or truth in its English dress.

World

"Mensonges" is undoubtedly a clever story, and the present version is excellent.

Vanity Fair

The book itself is an education: the very greatest novel of analysis and character France has produced since Balzac.

New York Commercial Advertiser

"A Living Lie," published in this country by Fenno, is one of the earlier works of Paul Burget, and one that shows both the weakness and strength of his methods. In an introduction written to the translation, the author speaks of his humble decipleship of Flaubert and Zola, and perhaps none of Bourget's novels better than this recent translation will show better how closely the student has followed the masters, especially the former. But one man could write "Madame Borany," and that was Flaubert, but there are portions of "Mensonges" that would lead one to believe that M. Bourget thought that he might have written it himself. Madame Borany's meeting with her lover in a house of ill-fame and Rene's meetings with his mistress might even seem to some as an illustration of where the pupil had learned his lesson too well.

As for the story itself there is no need of rehearsing that. It is strong, and viewed from the point of fiction is good. But since M. Bourget aspires to be something more than novelist, to be an analysist, a psychologist and feminologist, it would be wrong to ignore what he considers his best labor. Perhaps it would not be malapropos to quote, in relation to M. Bourget's study of women and women's mind, what Nietzsche has written, that we are puzzled when we try to probe women's mind, not because it is so deep, not because it has no bottom—"it is not even shallow." Which is basely cynical, and anyway it was written by a man who is now in a mad house. But, nevertheless, it is a good sentence to bear in mind when one is reading the works of a feminologist. There is no doubt of M. Bourget's intuitive powers. True, that too frequently does he affirm with unbecoming and exultant delight and misplaced passion that two and two are four, but often this leads to the higher and more complicated problems, such as four and four are eight. Surely M. Bourget is an analyst, but he spends too much time analyzing very obvious brick walls.

But, "A Living Lie" is good fiction, if it is not good literature. It is well translated.

R. F. FENNO & COMPANY, 112 Fifth Ave., N. Y.

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A Few Press Opinions on

Robert Urquhart

By GABRIEL SETOUN

12mo, Cloth, Illustrated, $1.00; Paper Covers, 50 Cents

The Outlook

"Robert Urquhart," by Gabriel Setoun, is a Scotch story possessing a certain degree of strength. Courageous indeed is the writer to-day who brings his work in contrast with that of Ian Maclaren, Crockett, and J. M. Barrie. Comparison between these masters and the lesser lights there cannot be.

Toledo Blade

In "Robert Urquhart," by Gabriel Setoun, the lovers of Scotch stories will experience a delight the same as felt in the reading of "The Lilac Sunbonnet," "Beside the Bonnie Brier Bush," "The Little Minister," and other novels and tales in which are found tender pathos, delicate humor and a dramatic construction. The character of old Rob cannot fail to impress all readers, winning their love by his simple kindness; while the schoolmaster's sturdy manliness calls forth feeling of liking and respect, with a desire that he shall gain his heart's wish. The story is well worth a reading.

Sunday Times

Lovers of a good story, which is at the same time good literature, and especially lovers of the Scotch atmosphere and temperament, will enjoy "Robert Urquhart." This is a new book by Gabriel Setoun, published by R. F. Fenno & Company. The central character is a school teacher, not the periwig old goose who has so long been strutting, conventional to a hair through Scotch stories, but a man of head and heart endowments which appeal to the head and the heart for our belief, sympathy and love. If Mr. Setoun had not the originality to lead the way, he has at least the genius to follow with highest credit in the paths of Barrie, Maclaren and Crockett, and who will say it is not as hard to follow creditably in beaten paths as to charm public fancy with a trifle when it is new?

Times-Union

"Robert Urquhart." This is an entertaining novel, well written, with a good plot and with many of the essentials of a book of the highest character. Its pretty binding should also be mentioned, and in this it suggests itself as a present to a friend. Its author is Gabriel Setoun. It is a Scotch tale. Its pathos is as sweet, its humor as delicate, its construction as dramatic and its characters as lovable as any to be found in the other Scottish stories which have caught the fancy.

Kansas City Journal

An American edition of "Robert Urquhart" will attract the attention of many thousands who have read and enjoyed "The Lilac Sunbonnet" "A Galloway Herd," "Beside the Bonnie Brier Bush," and "The Little Minister" and they will find within its covers a pathos as sweet, a humor as delicate a construction as dramatic, and characters as lovable as are to be found in any of the above-mentioned works.

R. F. FENNO & COMPANY, 112 Fifth Avenue, N. Y.

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A Few Press Opinions on

The Professor's Experiment

By MRS. HUNGERFORD (The Duchess)

12mo, Cloth, $1.25; Paper Covers, 50 Cents

The Watchman

"The 'experiment,' which gives name to the story, is a weird one and picturesquely presented, reminding one faintly of the old French story of the 'Broken Ear.' It turns the red light briskly on the hero and heroine, who, having been thus vividly introduced to us and to each other, proceed to the business of the occasion by falling in love with each other and entangling themselves in divers nets of embarrassing circumstances, settling away from the storm to a peaceful horizon of marriage at last. It has become necessary, in these days, to indicate the exceptional and welcome fact that this is a pure story; painting cheery pictures of normal domestic life, and opening no side doors to encourage the stealthy adventures of a prurient fancy. It is a novel, strictly speaking, involving neither sermon nor stump speech. It offers entertainment only, but it gives what it offers; resting the tired brain and leaving no poison in the blood."

Evening Bulletin

"It is a capital story of an Irish savant, who, like the magicians of mediæval days, passed his years in concocting a draught to put his subjects to sleep. Fortunately a beautiful girl of eighteen is found insensible on the professor's doorstep. She becomes his patient, enters upon a long sleep, and, in the 'large awakening,' learns that she is heiress to an immense fortune and the professor's granddaughter."

Indianapolis Journal

"'The Professor's Experiment' is the title of a new book by Mrs. Hungerford (The Duchess). It is of a somewhat more elaborate and ambitious character than this writer's recent stories, and shows a return to her earlier manner. The heroine is the impulsive, warm-hearted young Irish girl with whom all Mrs. Hungerford's readers are well acquainted, but of whom, in her various phases and reappearances they do not tire.

R. F. PENNO & COMPANY, 112 Fifth Avenue, New York

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A Few Press Opinions on

The Unclassed

By GEORGE GISSING

12mo, Cloth, Illustrated, $1.25; Paper Covers, 50 Cents

Outlook

It shows remarkable powers of observation and realistic reproduction of certain phases of life. It deals with the life of the "unclassed" very bluntly, and with unnecessary detail, but there is no intention to pervert morals.

Boston Post

The story is full of strong and telling situations, a story in which the realism often impinges closely upon the ideal. In many places the book is absorbing in its interest.

N. Y. Advertiser

It is a story of the struggling ones, struggling against and for class distinction; struggling to keep from going down into the "lowest class;" struggling to reach the class where bread and butter are not the only living cries.

Buffalo Commercial

Mr. Gissing has secured a place in the front rank of the best English novelists, and any story of which he is the author will be widely and eagerly read. "The Unclassed" is a thrilling, intensely dramatic story.

Meadville Stylus

Ida Starr is a child of ten years when the story opens. It closes with her marriage. We are permitted to observe her character in all the stages of its development from a childhood all love and gentleness, through a solitary and defenseless girlhood spent in a desperate struggle against the poverty that ends in starvation, through her temptation, her fall, and her redemption through love. There are, curiously enough, no traces of the influence of the naturalistics chool in Mr. Gissing's work. The entire story is planned and wrought out with the greatest imaginable delicacy.

R. F. FENNO & COMPANY, 112 Fifth Ave., N. Y.

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A Few Press Opinions on

Uncle Scipio

By Mrs. JEANNETTE H. WALWORTH

12mo, Cloth, $1.25; Paper Covers, 50 Cents

Public Opinion

A very effective story of the reconstruction days in Mississippi is Mrs. Jeannette H. Walworth's "Uncle Scipio." It is bright and healthy, with a well devised plot, full of incident and entertaining. Stories based on those days of fermentation are not at all rare, but Mrs. Walworth, being a transplanted Northener, has been able to take, not a dispassionate view, but that of a warm-hearted, clear-headed woman. Her novel, however, is by no means a political argument; the time is in the early seventies, and the situation which then existed in the South is merely a background for a good story, which is about the best Mrs. Walworth has written.

Courier

Mrs. Walworth's stories of Southern and negro life are vivaciously characteristic of people and scenes of that portion of our country, and they reveal charming pictures of a variety of types, grave and gay. This is a love story, set in the gay picturesque Mississippi Valley, describing the conditions that prevailed immediately after the war of the rebellion. Mrs. Walworth is a Southerner by adoption, and she is thus enabled to give us a true and sympathetic insight that is certain to please and at the same time instruct.

Commercial Advertiser

Mrs. J. H. Walworth has already some celebrity as a story writer. "Uncle Scipio," which has made its appearance fresh from her pen, is a love tale, set in the picturesque Mississippi Valley. As a Northern woman the writer finds much in the country of her adoption, immediately following the cival war, to strike her with peculiar force. She is thus enabled to give a true and sympathetic insight that is certain to please and at the same time instruct. "Uncle Scipio," the hero of the story, is a dear old negro slave of the Uncle Tom variety, for whom the reader is bound to form a genuine admiration and attachment before he lays down the book.

Post

A love story set in the Mississippi Valley, describing the conditions that prevailed immediately after the War of the Rebellion. Mrs. Walworth is a Southerner by adoption, and she is thus enabled to give us a true and sympathetic insight that is certain to please and at the same time instruct. Uncle Scipio is a dear old negro slave that you are sure to become attached to before the volume is laid aside.

Plain Dealer

Mrs. J. H. Walworth's "Uncle Scipio" is a story of the South the time of which is the reconstruction period but the action had its beginning in the ante-war days and was shaped by the events of the great struggle. "Uncle Scipio" is the old negro whose reminiscent gossip with the visiting agent of a Northern land syndicate brings out the story which Mrs. Walworth narrates with the skill of a practical novelist.

R. F. FENNO & CO., 112 Fifth Ave., N. Y.

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